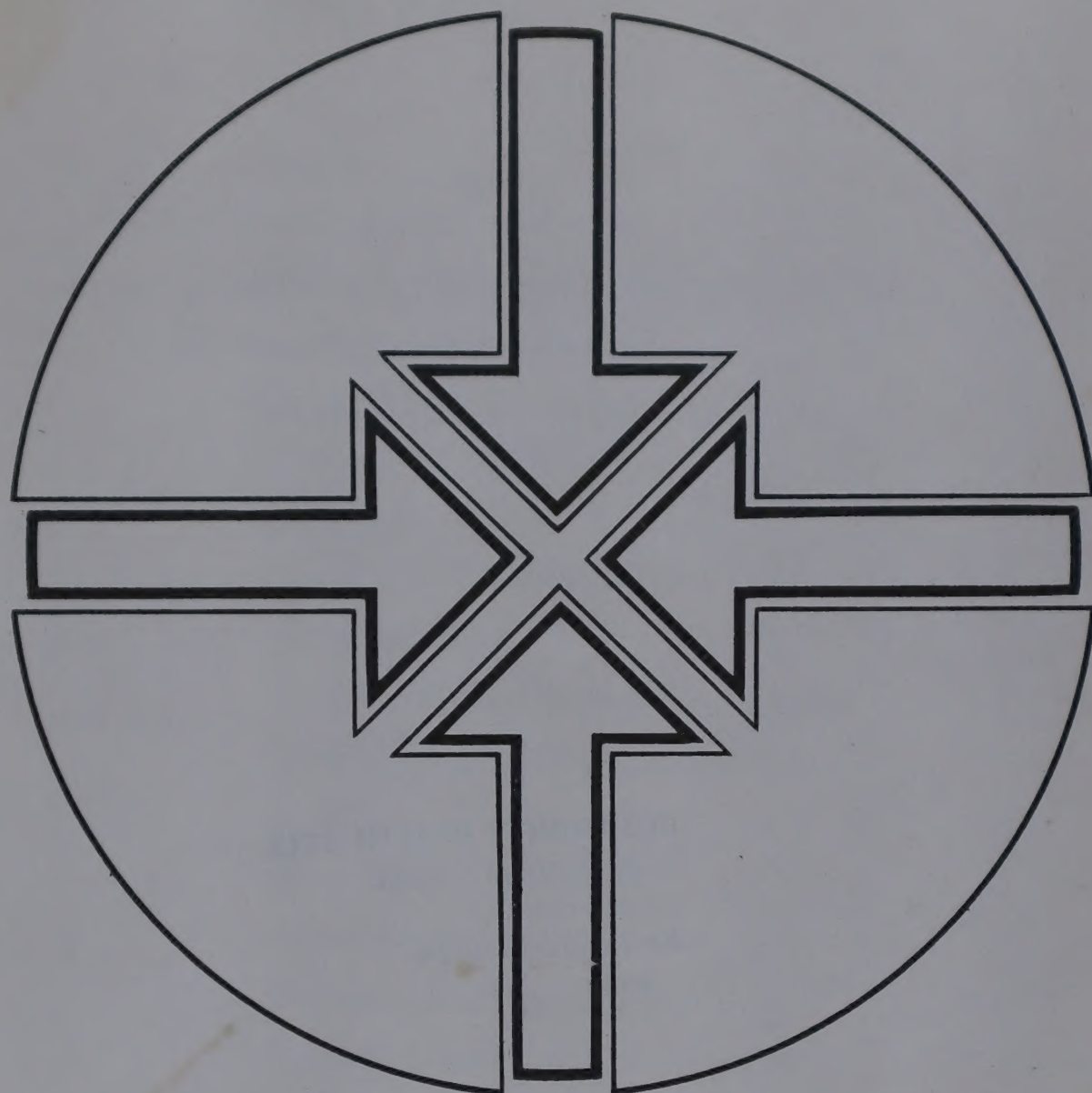


**PARTICIPATORY
EVALUATION**
ISSUES AND CONCERNS

02524



HEALTH CELL



PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

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PREFACE

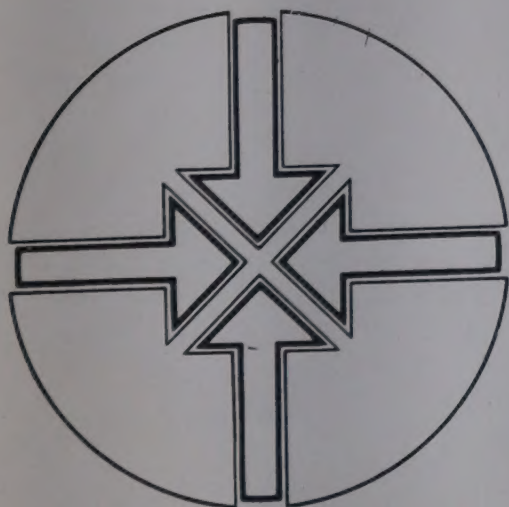
Evaluation has become a commonplace word and practice in development programmes throughout the world. Not only are programmes, plans and activities being designed and implemented to promote development in education, health, agriculture, etc. but they are also being evaluated regularly and frequently. There has also evolved, over the last couple of decades, specialized expertise, institutions and a body of knowledge in support of evaluation. However, much of this evaluation practice and theory continues to be utilized in a manner that is very similar to top-down models of development, which are currently being replaced by bottom-up strategies.

In the course of our work with grass-roots organizations and non-governmental initiatives in India, and other countries of Asia, we have evolved, through our own practice, some ideas, principles and theory about Participatory Evaluation. We evolved these principles not only based on the critique of traditional evaluation approaches but also based on what seemed relevant and appropriate in a given concrete situation.

In our interactions with other practitioners, we have found multiple and varied meanings being given to the concept of Participatory Evaluation. For some, Participatory Evaluation implies the process of action-reflection-action. In the process of conscientizing and organizing the poor, several grass-roots activists and organizations have evolved a methodology of action-reflection-action. It is this process which is equated with the meaning of Participatory Evaluation by some. On the other hand, we have been calling our involvement in facilitating evaluation and analysis of a programme, an organization or a perspective as Participatory Evaluation.

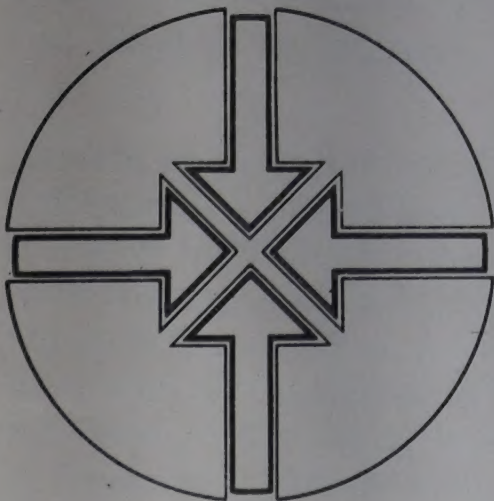
This collection has arisen out of that practice and reflection, and limits itself to our definition of Participatory Evaluation. Over the years, many development activists, grass-roots organizers, leaders of non-governmental organizations, nationally and internationally, and managers of development programmes in government have been asking us about our interpretations, meanings and principles of Participatory Evaluation. This collection is intended to assist in answering those questions. It is essentially a compilation of our own involvement in Participatory Evaluation with several types of development programmes and organizations in India and elsewhere.

The bulk of the material in this volume is case-studies – eight of them. There is an opening section which essentially outlines our understanding of participatory evaluation. What is Participatory Evaluation? Why is it needed? Why is Participatory Evaluation needed in development? And, briefly, how is such an evaluation carried out? After the case-studies, the last section attempts to respond to a series of questions that have been raised in the context of our own practice over these years. It is hoped that these responses would provide beginnings of an answer in the future.



Therefore, this volume can be of some assistance to those who are planning to get involved in similar exercises in their own development efforts; it may provide examples for others for discussion and critique; it may raise some issues which others have also been grappling with in the course of their practice of Participatory Evaluation.

We shall appreciate your responses and contributions to further this process in refining the theory and practice of Participatory Evaluation in development.



INTRODUCTION

The process of evaluation is integral to human thinking, reflection and daily existence.

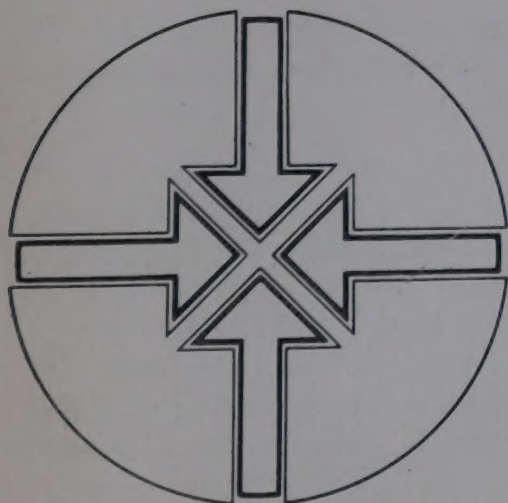
The growth of human civilization has implied human reflection throughout its history. As human beings, individually and collectively, confronted nature for their basic survival in the early days, they also began to reflect on their experience in order to improve ways and means of finding food for survival. This process of reflection is what has now come to be known as 'evaluation'. Thus, evaluation is an integral process of human development and existence. All of us engage in evaluation of our day's work, of the different stages in our life, of our accomplishments, of our failures, as well as, an evaluation of others and their accomplishments. Thus the process of evaluation is integral to human thinking, reflection and daily existence.

With the rise of specialization in different areas of work and disciplines, evaluation has also become a specialized activity. This has become particularly so in the context of development theory and practice. Over the last two decades, development programmes involved in agriculture, rural development, health, education, forestry, drinking water, etc. have been evaluated with great vigour and rigour. Evaluation has also been incorporated as an integral part of the planning and implementation of each development programme. Thus the practice and usage of evaluation has become widespread in all development initiatives throughout the world.

By and large, most development programmes now provide for time and resources for evaluation and invite those specialized in conducting such evaluations to do so. As a consequence of this practice of evaluation, certain distortions in the process have emerged over the years. First of all, evaluation became a specialized, separate activity away from the ongoing planning and implementation of a development initiative. It became such a specialization that specialized people and institutions began to be involved in it; and programme planners and implementers and those benefitting from it felt alienated from this process of evaluation.

Secondly, misplaced emphasis on separation of programme implementation and evaluation got supported under the belief of objectivity. It was felt that those implementing a development programme may not have the necessary motivation to assess their efforts dispassionately and objectively. Thus external people and institutions, mostly outsiders to the given development programme, began to play the central role in evaluation.

A third distortion emerged as a consequence of resource-providers, be they national or international donors, demanding that evaluation of the programmes they support be carried out periodically. Thus evaluation became the link to the possibilities of future resources and, therefore, something to be cautious of and to protect oneself from. As a consequence of evaluation exercises becoming the links to the question of continuation of grants and resources, it became an exercise in "hiding the mistakes"



and "putting the best foot forward". Thus, when externally appointed evaluators visited programme sites, everybody praised the programme, kept critical information away from surfacing and remained generally in a state of terror during the period evaluation was being conducted.

Thus evaluation became a tool to control programmes, resources, programme planners and implementers in the field of development over these years. This alienation and distancing of the evaluation process, from being an integral part of human thinking and activity, provided the basis for posing questions and evolving an alternative theory and practice of evaluation. This is what has come to be known as Participatory Evaluation.

Participatory Evaluation is the methodology of making evaluation an integral process of any planning, and implementing a development initiative which puts people involved in it in the centre and not remain on the periphery.

Participatory Evaluation is the methodology of making evaluation an integral process of any planning, and implementing a development initiative which puts people involved in it in the centre and not remain on the periphery. This implies a collective process of reflection, critical assessment and review about the accomplishment (or lack of accomplishment) of programme goals. Therefore, having a standard, a goal or an objective as a yardstick becomes important in determining the value of a given activity.

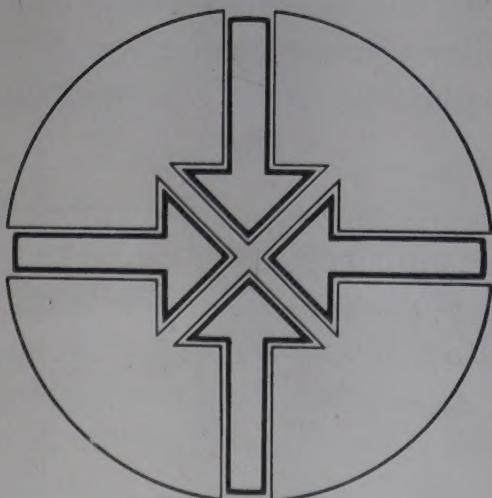
Historically, evaluation has implied assessing the accomplishment of the goals of a given programme, by measuring the impact of the activities and plans when the goals were set.

Clearly this kind of an evaluation can help us understand the extent to which the planned activities led to the accomplishment of the goals, the reasons for not meeting these goals, and the consequences of such activities other than accomplishment of the stated goals. The value of evaluation can be extended if it can be seen as an exercise in promoting the future development of the programme and the people involved in it, and not merely a historical analysis of the past. Thus, this link between the past and the future is one of the starting premises of Participatory Evaluation. By definition, Participatory Evaluation is intended to be developmental in nature, and not regulatory or controlling. It is intended to promote the growth and development of programmes, plans, perspectives and organizations in the future. Therefore, it is seen as an intervention within an overall framework of the past and the future.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

The central characteristic of Participatory Evaluation is that people involved in a given development programme or organization, both as implementers and as beneficiaries, start participating in, and take charge of the evaluation efforts.

The control over the process of evaluation remains in the hands of those who are developing and implementing and benefitting from the programmes. Thus, the evaluation serves the interest of furthering the benefits and improving the programmes and organizations involved in development at the base, and not those who are intending to control it from the top. In a way, Participatory Evaluation is an attempt at redefining and reaffirming development as a "bottom-up", "people-centered", "people-controlled" process and not a technocratic, top-down intervention. It is this thrust that provides the distinctive meaning to Participatory Evaluation methodology.



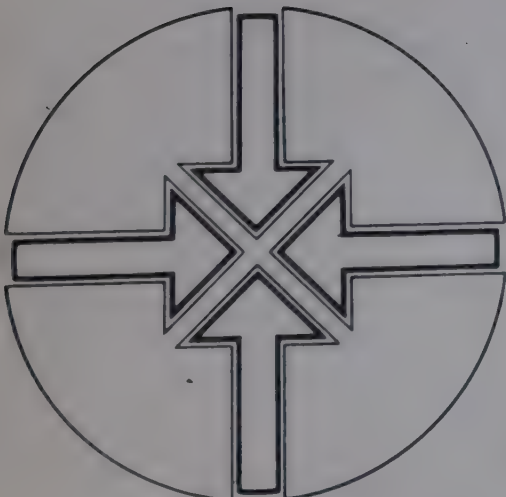
WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION?

Before we answer the question what is Participatory Evaluation, it may be useful, first of all to become clear as to what is evaluation. The literal meaning of the word 'evaluation' is "to determine the value of". This essentially means to assess the worth of, the value of, a given activity. This implies at least two things: *first*, that a given activity is to be assessed in a given context – the process of assessment, of analysis, of review is critical in any evaluation; *second* is to assess the activity in relation to something and that something is the goal or the objective of the activity. All development programmes and plans evolve with a given set of objectives and goals. We evolve these goals and objectives on the basis of certain broader understanding and values. In order to achieve these goals, certain activities are planned. These plans are then intended to accomplish the above goals. Once the plans have been implemented, we can then assess whether these activities really led to the accomplishment of these goals or not. This is the process of evaluation. (See Chart I).

Participatory Evaluation is to be seen as a process of individual and collective learning. In a sense, it is an educational experience.

Participatory Evaluation implies that it is developmental and is in the interests of those who are involved in planning and implementing the given developmental activities and benefitting from the same. Thus, the process of evaluation is to be controlled by those whose activities, initiatives, plans and outcomes are being evaluated. Another characteristic of Participatory Evaluation, given its above concern, is to ensure that it is a collective process of reflection, planning and control and that it is not a process whereby a single individual reflects on behalf of others and presents outcomes of his/her reflection for others to use in developing their plans. This collective nexus of Participatory Evaluation ensures a wider control as well as broader developmental possibilities.

Finally, Participatory Evaluation is to be seen as a process of individual and collective learning. In a sense, it is an educational experience. It is learning about one's strengths, about one's weaknesses; learning about the way plans and programmes get implemented; learning about social processes and development outcomes; learning about social reality and intervening in the same; learning about creation and development of organizations and ensuring their relevance and longevity. It implies clarifying and rearticulating one's vision and perspective about the development work we are involved in. This educational thrust of Participatory Evaluation methodology implies that various parties involved in a development programme experience Participatory Evaluation as a learning process for themselves. And, the process is designed and structured in such



a way that it ensures that learning. It is not merely the outcome of Participatory Evaluation which provides insights and learning, it is also the very involvement in the process of Participatory Evaluation that becomes the basis for learning and education. Thus it creates conditions conducive to, and willingness for, change for action. This is a crucial distinction between Participatory Evaluation and conventional evaluation methodologies.

At the core of Participatory Evaluation methodology, therefore, is our faith in ordinary people, grass-roots workers, community organizers, adult educators etc., our belief that they are themselves interested in improving their practice, sharpening their vision and developing themselves; and that they would be interested in, and committed to, evaluating themselves, their activities and programmes in order to do so. It is this faith in ordinary people, in their willingness and capacity to get involved in a critical reflection exercise that provides the philosophical underpinning to Participatory Evaluation methodology. This is the basic difference between looking at Participatory Evaluation as a developmental experience, an educational experience as opposed to a regulatory mechanism, of control over people, programmes and resources.

The Participatory Evaluation methodology is rooted in a certain world-view, a certain vision about human beings and their capacity and, therefore, in a certain interpretation of social reality.

It is, therefore, important to recognize that Participatory Evaluation methodology is rooted in a certain world-view, a certain vision about human beings and their capacity and, therefore, in a certain interpretation of social reality. It is not a mere tool or technique which is distinct from other tools or techniques and can be mechanically applied and implemented in any context. Its historical and contextual underpinning lies in the process of making development, and related activities, controlled by the people at the base in their own collective interest, and it provides the basic meaning to Participatory Evaluation methodology. Without that context, it may be misappropriated and misinterpreted, as a mere set of tools and techniques.



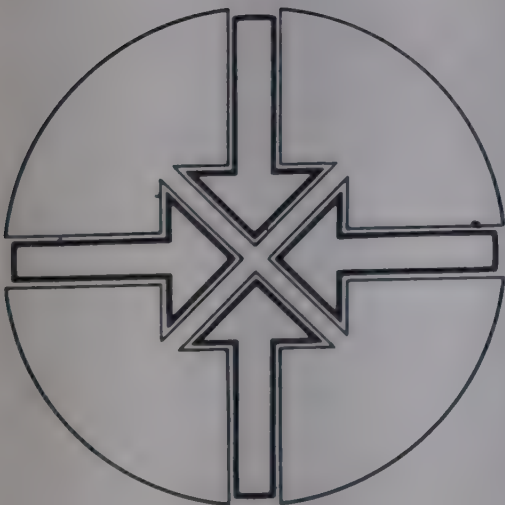
WHY PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION?

The Participatory Evaluation methodology is consistent with participatory models of development which are now being experimented with at the grass-roots level throughout the world.

Having clarified what is Participatory Evaluation methodology, it may be useful to spend some time understanding its relevance and importance in the context of development. It is our view that Participatory Evaluation methodology is consistent with participatory models of development which are now being experimented with at the grass-roots level throughout the world. In the new models of development, people are at the centre, and are involved in creating their own plans and programmes for their development, and such plans and programmes are implemented through their active involvement and overall control. Given this thrust of people-centered, bottom-up development, it makes consistent sense to ensure that the process of reflection and evaluation has similar characteristics and meaning. It will be a contradiction to have a people-centered, bottom-up process of development evaluated through commissioned agents appointed by resource-providers. It is in this context that the value of Participatory Evaluation becomes heightened.

In the context of such a development initiative specifically, Participatory Evaluation has been utilized with three broad emphases. (See Chart II). The *first* emphasis of Participatory Evaluation has been on the programmes and activities within a given development context. The assumptions behind developing a programme are tested through a Participatory Evaluation exercise after the programme has been implemented for a period of time. These programmes and activities could be an adult education effort, an income-generating programme, a rural development initiative or a health care programme. Development programmes are planned to accomplish some short-term goals, and evaluation of the activities at the programme level can help us to assess whether those goals have been accomplished and to what extent, and what came in the way of doing the same. Thus, Participatory Evaluation has been largely utilized in assessing the impact of a given programme, in assessing the underlying assumptions by which those programmes were created, in assessing the relevance of those programmes in the context of changing social realities, and in assessing the manner in which those programmes were implemented.

Thus, the focus of such an evaluation exercise is essentially on the "field" and it largely entails active involvement of local population, people who are likely to benefit and gain from the programmes and field-level staff and organizers. This is a very important emphasis in Participatory Evaluation because it helps us to improve our programmes in the future and to strengthen the possibilities of accomplishing those goals and objec-



The focus of an evaluation exercise is essentially on the "field" and it largely entails active involvement of local population, people who are likely to benefit and gain from the programmes and field-level staff and organizers.

tives in the future. Such an evaluation also helps us to define new programme thrusts, new programme activities, new ways of implementing programmes and activities, and extending the dimensions of existing programmes.

The *second* major emphasis in Participatory Evaluation has been on the development-promoting organization itself. In order to plan, implement and sustain development programmes and activities in a given area, we all create organizations as mechanisms for the same. Over a period of time, these organizations have to develop their own internal capacity to continue this process of development. As people join in these organizations, as systems, procedures and structures get created in these organizations, as the external environment begins to interact with these organizations, various organizational issues begin to emerge in the history of all development-promoting organizations. These issues relate to people-to-people interaction, interpersonal relations, issues of team-building, conflict between young and old, new members and old members, field staff vs head office staff, etc.

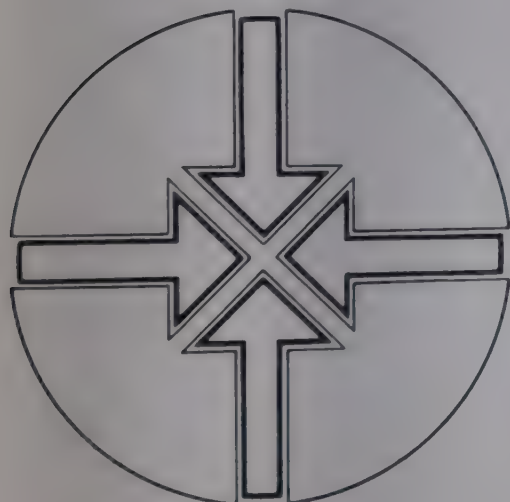
Organizational issues also include the tension between the need for routine structure and spontaneity and flexibility, between the need to create a minimum agreed common ground and the need to provide space for individual creativity, the need to ensure a common understanding of the organization's missions and goals and tasks, and the need to provide opportunity for members of the organization to continuously redefine those missions, goals and tasks. Over a period of time, all development-promoting organizations begin to interact with their social, political and regulatory environment. Various laws and rules governing them begin to affect them; donors and other resource-providers begin to influence them and the organizations need to evolve strategies to not only cope with these segments of the environments, but also to influence them more actively. Over a period of time, all development promoting organizations, as a consequence of their success, begin to expand and grow into new areas, new programmes, new activities and new staff. Growth brings new issues in its wake and organizations begin to face a series of issues arising out of this growth process. These and many more such organizational issues become a necessary focus of attention in the context of development.

A Participatory Evaluation exercise, with its emphasis on the organization, can help us reflect on these issues, and others, and to evolve strategies to deal with them in an open, critical and collective fashion. A Participatory Evaluation intervention around such issues can help bring about a common and shared understanding of the problems and collective efforts to solve them. Such a Participatory Evaluation intervention can help in developing the organization and ensuring its smooth, strong and dynamic future. Such a Participatory Evaluation intervention with emphasis on organizational issues, has a process that is "institution-focused" and entails the active involvement of the field staff, senior members of the organization including its governing body members and other key parties in its environment. The need to utilize Participatory Evaluation intervention around such organizational issues is only beginning to be



A Participatory Evaluation intervention with emphasis on organizational issues, has a process that is "institution-focussed" and entails the active involvement of the field staff, senior members of the organization including its governing body members and other key parties in its environment.

A Participatory Evaluation intervention emphasizing a reflection of the perspective is "vision-focussed" and it necessarily entails active involvement of senior members of the organization and all those who are involved in it, as the vision and commitment of all development-promoting individuals becomes the focus of the intervention.



recognized among the development community in recent years. Our experience has suggested that this is an extremely crucial area where a Participatory Evaluation exercise can be of immense value in ensuring strength, dynamism and vitality of a development promoting organization.

The *third* area where Participatory Evaluation has put emphasis is on the perspective with which a development initiative is undertaken. Development is a socio-political issue and it entails a certain vision and commitment. We all have a vision about what society ought to be and a commitment for changing the given existing system towards that vision. Our perspective helps us determine how this change process will occur and what could be our role in supporting and strengthening such a change process. All development programmes are created as a consequence of this perspective. Our perspectives are based on certain assumptions which can be refined through Participatory Evaluation. A Participatory Evaluation exercise can help us redefine our perspective in the context of changing social reality.

Many times the social reality around us changes so rapidly that we need to re-examine our perspective and redefine our role in the context of the new reality. A Participatory Evaluation exercise can also help us to reaffirm our vision, our faith and our commitment. It can help us to sharpen our understanding of the social reality and possibilities of our intervention in the same. A reflection process catalyzed through Participatory Evaluation with emphasis on perspective may entail a rejuvenation of our commitment, our vision, our direction, our understanding, our ideology, and the potential possibilities of our role in the future. Many a times development-promoting individuals and organizations experience a certain sense of stagnation, a plateau in their work and become confused about which way to go, what are the future steps and directions in their own role. It is in these moments we have found that a Participatory Evaluation intervention has been extremely useful in not only reclarifying but also reaffirming the vision, commitment and perspective.

Thus, a Participatory Evaluation intervention emphasizing a reflection of the perspective is "vision-focussed" and it necessarily entails active involvement of senior members of the organization and all those who are involved in it, as the vision and commitment of all development-promoting individuals becomes the focus of the intervention.

Thus, a Participatory Evaluation intervention in a development context can be utilized to reflect on the programme, or the organization or the perspective. In reality, all these three are intertwined. And, many a times, Participatory Evaluation exercise helps identify congruence, or otherwise, between perspective, programme and organization. This can become a major outcome of such an exercise. We have found that the primary emphasis in context to above three areas of a given Participatory Evaluation intervention determines the scope, the nature, the timing and the methods utilized, as can be seen from Chart II.

In the case-studies presented, three (Village Development Trust, Charity Bengal and Andhra Pradesh Balwadi Programme) are based on the

primary emphasis on *programmes*; the other three (Inter School Project, Jagriti and Rural Development Organization) have a primary emphasis on their own *organization*; and the last two (Workers' Education Project and Tribal Development Society) have a primary emphasis on the *perspective*. As the case-studies themselves show, other aspects also get involved in it, though the primary emphasis continues to determine the scope and the depth of the evaluation.

Participatory Evaluation is

based on our faith that people are interested in improving their practice and sharpening their vision;

developmental in nature; and in the interest of those who are actual actors of the activities to be evaluated;

a process controlled by those whose activities, initiatives, plans and outcomes are evaluated;

a collective process of reflection and planning;

an educational experience for those involved in it.



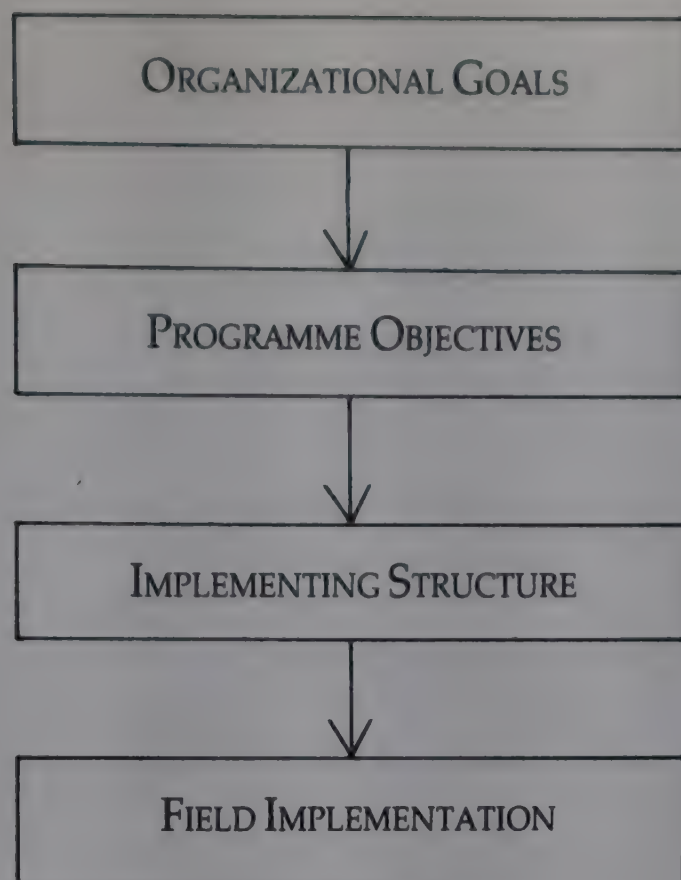


CHART I

Primary Emphasis	Programme	Organization	Perspective
Process	Field focus	Institution focus	Vision focus
Participants	Local people Field staff	Field staff Senior members of the organization Governing body members	Senior members of the organization
Methods	Questionnaires, interviews, records	Perceptual data, interviews, group meetings	Discussions, meetings, etc.
	VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT TRUST CHARITY BENGAL ANDHRA PRADESH BALWADI PROGRAMME	RURAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION JAGRITI INTER SCHOOL PROJECT	TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY WORKERS' EDUCATION PROJECT

CHART II

HOW IS A PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION EXERCISE PLANNED AND CONDUCTED?

Much of this becomes clearer in the context of the case-studies presented in the next section. We believe that there is no readymade formula which can be applied in all situations. What we can suggest are a series of steps that we have used in our own context. Some of the key steps in the process are outlined in this section.

1. SETTING OBJECTIVES: FRAMES OF REFERENCE

The first task in any Participatory Evaluation exercise is to set objectives of the evaluation. We have traditionally utilized an initial workshop, with all key actors in the development situation, to set the objectives of the evaluation. We find that this is the most crucial step where discussions on why we need evaluation at this stage, to whom it is going to benefit, what problems it is going to cause to our work and what should be the key objectives of such an evaluation exercise are discussed at length and sorted out. At the end of this step the focus of evaluation gets determined and articulated. It is here that the distinction between the emphasis on programme, organization or perspective begins to get stated. This helps us set the frame of reference within which a given evaluation exercise then proceeds.



2. IDENTIFYING PARAMETERS AND INFORMATION NEEDED

Having agreed upon the objectives of evaluation, the next step is to identify what kind of information is needed on what parameters. For example, if the purpose of the evaluation is to assess the impact of the health programme, then the infant mortality rate could be one of the parameters on which we need to get information. This is an exercise that requires

some reflection on what is it that we are trying to assess. It is the statement of those dimensions, those factors, those aspects, those variables, which we are trying to assess that this step entails and it may involve a certain degree of reflection and thinking before these parameters get articulated.

3. IDENTIFYING SOURCES OF INFORMATION

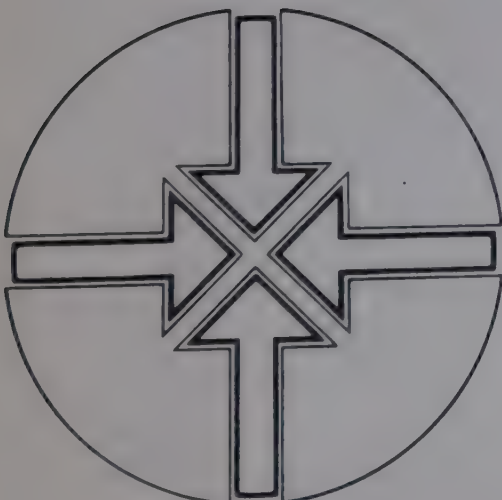
Once we know what information we want, then we can identify where we are going to get it from. The source of information could be members in the community, field staff, senior members of the organization, parties in the environment (like government officials), records, reports, documents, actual field situation etc. Different types of information can be obtained from different sources. Where people's impressions, views, experiences, perceptions, ideas, feelings are important, people themselves become the major source of information. Besides, historical and archival records and documents can also provide valuable information.

4. DEVELOPING METHODS TO OBTAIN THAT INFORMATION AND DATA COLLECTION

Once we know what information we want and what is the source of that particular information, we can then develop methods to obtain that information. Methods of data-collection can be varied: we can have open-ended interviews, questionnaires, structured interviews, group discussions, field observations, study of records, physical measurements, etc. In addition to the use of all these methods which have also been used in traditional evaluation practices, newer methods of data-collection can also be evolved. Folk media, songs, role-plays, dramas, art, drawings, etc., have also been extensively used in getting information through popular means. Essentially this step entails developing appropriate methods for collection of information and then collecting that information.

5. ANALYSING DATA

Once information has been collected from different sources in different ways then it has to be put together, consolidated, categorized and analysed. Some common patterns, some variations, some links, some relations, some measures have to be developed through this process of analysis. It is important that at this stage of analysis a collective process is supported and encouraged, so that analysis becomes a shared one, as opposed to an individual one. The point needs to be emphasized here that the collective analysis thus reached should be disseminated to all those constituencies from where this information has been taken. This "feedback" is an important step in the process.



6. CREATING FUTURE SCENARIOS

Inevitably, we have found that analysis of the past is very closely linked to creating future scenarios. In our practice of Participatory Evaluation, we have deliberately utilized this step to assist parties involved in the evaluation process to paint desirable future scenarios on the basis of the analysis so developed. Sometimes this step also entails assessing the outside environment in order to paint such future scenarios for their work, for their programmes, for their local situations, etc.

7. EVOLVING ACTION PLANS

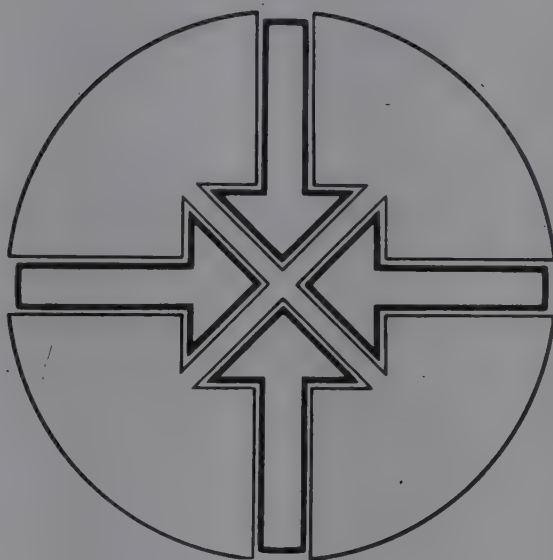
Multiple future scenarios are then discussed, sorted out and integrated and the parties are encouraged to develop concrete action plans arising out of the analysis and the agreed upon future scenarios. These action plans, at least in the context of Participatory Evaluation, are broadly identified, and not concretely planned in detail. That could be a step following the evaluation exercise.

SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES

The crucial step cutting through all the previous steps of the planning process is to ensure that responsibility for these various tasks in the evaluation process is shared between different parties – local people, field staff, other members of the organization, facilitators of the evaluation, etc. This is important to ensure authenticity in data-collection and rigour in analysis, as well as in sustaining the ownership of different parties to the evaluation process. A time-plan is also developed at the same time.

We now invite you to study the case-studies in the next section. These illustrations will help clarify some practical questions in Participatory Evaluation, they will also provoke some issues for reflection. The last section addresses some of those issues.





CASE STUDIES

VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT TRUST

The Village Development Trust (VDT) has been working for the last 12 years in coastal Tamil Nadu with the rural poor. It started its work in the mid-seventies, in the wake of the severe cyclone which washed away a number of villages and rendered people homeless and jobless. VDT used its own resources and that of the government to help rehabilitate cyclone-affected people, helping people build their houses, providing them agricultural inputs for developing and reclaiming the land. Over the years, Village Development Trust has also undertaken a variety of other programmes like animal husbandry, health care, adult education, social forestry, etc.

VDT began working with the women in the villages encouraging them to save a small amount of money every month. Over a period of time, these Savings Societies began to offer loans to their members for small economic activities like buying of a goat or a hen or seeds, etc. Later, VDT bought its own resources also and made them available to these savings and thrift societies of the women in the villages. Thus larger amounts of funds became available for women to use in different economic programmes. Most of these were given to individual women as loans to pursue an economic activity. Milch animals became a major programme and VDT developed veterinary care and training of local, illiterate, and semi-literate women as bare-foot veterinarians. After a few years of functioning of these savings groups, which began to be called Mahila Mandals, in 32 villages, VDT helped create an umbrella organization which was intended to be the overall guiding institution of various individual village-based Mahila Mandals.

This evaluation process was initiated at the joint request of VDT and the donor agency supporting its women's programme. It was felt that since VDT was considering expansion of the programme to another 25-30 villages, it would like to take stock of its existing programmes before it moved forward. An initial discussion with VDT representatives, donor representatives and representatives from the intervening agency took place. This was followed by the visit of a four-person team to the area of work of VDT. After a brief survey of the field and an initial familiarization with the programme, it was decided to plan the evaluation along with the field and programme staff working on the women's programme in VDT.

This planning focussed upon looking at various aspects of the functioning of Mahila Mandals, the nature of membership and leadership in these, the kinds of activities undertaken by them and the future potential of these women's organizations at the village and local levels. The first step in the planning was to have a day long workshop with the ten field staff



involved in the women's programme of VDT. The facilitators encouraged reflection of the staff to identify important characteristics of what they conceived as strong Mahila Mandals. A series of characteristics were listed and consolidated after discussion. Each staff member was then requested to evaluate the existing 32 Mahila Mandals on these characteristics and to classify them into three types: strong, average and weak. Out of this classification, 15 Mahila Mandals were chosen for indepth field visit by the intervening agency and VDT teams. Out of these selected Mahila Mandals, five were strong, five average and five weak.

A common framework for collection of information in the field was evolved by the intervening agency and VDT and guidelines for interviews with members and leaders of Mahila Mandals and criteria for study of their records were jointly elaborated so that a comparative analysis across Mahila Mandals could be undertaken.

Over the next three months, indepth field visits were made in some Mahila Mandals by a joint intervening agency-VDT team, in some others only by the intervening agency team and in some villages only by VDT. These field visits entailed discussions with leaders of Mahila Mandals and members, observation of their monthly and weekly meetings, study of the records kept by these at the village level and discussions with the field staff working with those specific Mahila Mandals in the field. Simultaneously, indepth interviews with other staff involved in the VDT programme were also held to understand the history, orientation and impact of the programme from their point of view.

Based on the data-collection in the field, reports on each Mahila Mandal were prepared by the intervening agency and VDT. These reports were then shared and discussed in a workshop with senior VDT staff in the field. On the basis of these individual reports on Mahila Mandals visited, an overall draft report with key findings was prepared. These key findings were then further discussed in the workshop with four senior VDT staff along with the intervening agency team and donor representatives, and modifications were made thereto on the basis of additional information and analysis. Some of the key findings from the evaluation are presented here.

KEY FINDINGS

The following are some of the key findings based on the above:

ENTRY

1. Cyclone relief and rehabilitation efforts provided initial entry and credibility to VDT in the villages of the area. As a result of its land reclamation and agro-input programmes, VDT made a-credible entry to the villages in 1978. This was further reinforced in some other places following the 1983 cyclone. Loans arranged through banks for purchase of bullock-carts, artisan implements and milch animals helped considerably in rehabilitating affected families. This provided opportunity for VDT to



gain entry to, and credibility with, the local village and provided the foundation for its future work. It was this involvement of VDT that also later led to substantial infrastructural improvement in the area – roads, electricity, bank branches, etc.

2. Thrift collection provided the basis for bringing women together and organizing Mahila Mandals. In early eighties, VDT began to encourage poor rural women to save, and pool their savings in a thrift account. These savings then were used to advance small loans. In fact, women in four villages started collecting thrift in 1979 on their own, and VDT started promoting it in 1981. The main thrift and loans programme started in 1982 and spread in 1983. This thrift collection activity has brought women together in 32 villages. Now there are about 4000 women members in these thrift societies and savings total about two lakhs rupees.

MAHILA MANDALS AND THEIR LEADERSHIP

3. The Mahila Mandals gradually generated women leaders who began to operate these units. These thrift collection units were called Mahila Mandals (MMs). Initially, each MM had a secretary and a president. This was discontinued three years ago as some of these leaders began to develop vested interests. Now, there are Advisory Committees (AC) for each MM. The AC meets regularly (fortnightly or so) to review loan applications and monitor repayments. Membership in AC varies from three to 12, depending partly on the size of MM. Yet, in many villages (10 out of 15 visited) old presidents and secretaries continue to be members of AC and are recognized as such. The MMs became operating units for thrift, and AC became the leadership group of MM. It is clear that many of the AC members have emerged as important and confident women leaders in those villages.

4. AC leadership is largely representative of MM membership. The leadership represented in AC, by and large, represents the membership. One third of the membership of MM comprises better-off rural women (criteria like land ownership of three acres or above, pucca house, not doing wage labour, etc.); the rest are marginal farmers (less than one acre of land), landless labourers, potters, fishermen, etc. The leadership of AC is slightly more than half in the hands of better-off women. Most women members of AC, at least the active ones, come from somewhat better-off families. It seems that VDT first concentrated on getting the women out, any woman, and were not bothered about poor women only. The composition of MMs and ACs shows no class uniformity.

5. Key women leaders in most Mahila Mandals are economically better-off. Though each AC has some landless and harijan and wage labour women as members, the key leadership is mostly exercised by a somewhat better-off woman. In one of the villages the secretary's family owns eight acres of land; in another village, the president is considerably well-off. Wage labourers and other poor women do not attend most of the AC meetings since these are held in the afternoons. On an average, attendance of AC members is 60 per cent. In one village, harijans are effectively



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excluded from MM; in another village, most landless women do not show any interest. At the same time, three-four landless women have also begun to exercise considerable confident leadership in some MMs. However, heterogenous membership of MMs and ACs tends to favour better-off women taking over key leadership functions.

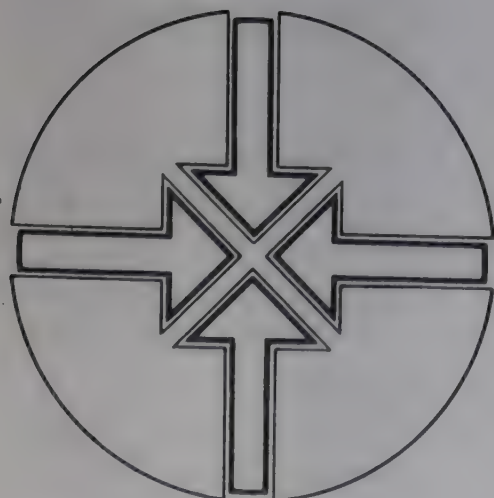
6. Collective and strong women's leadership has not emerged in most MMs. While individual women with confidence, courage and competence have emerged as leaders in most MMs, building of strong collective and shared leadership of MMs has not taken place. There have been many examples of infighting, splits, absenteeism, interpersonal conflicts and individualized functioning in some MMs. There is continual conflict between the president and the secretary of one MM; faction leaders dominate another MM; women's leadership in another MM has witnessed a split; one woman alone leads in another MM. In the course of the functioning of AC and MM, several tensions and difficulties have emerged which have hampered the growth of strong and collective women's leadership. It needs to be recognized that these tensions and conflicts are inherent in this type of effort; but focussed handling of these processes can help overcome them and thereby contribute to a shared and collective leadership in these MMs.

7. AC leadership is perceived to have cornered most of the benefits from loans and programmes. The data analysed on loan as for the last three years does not suggest that many loans have been cornered by AC members. Two things are important here. First, some initial loans made available through the umbrella organization have first gone to AC members themselves. This seems to be particularly so in one village (nurseries with AC members, six paddy loans to AC members). Second, ordinary members perceive AC members favouring themselves and promoting favouritism. The AC leaders have been accused of being selfish and self-centered three villages. In some places, women feel that AC leadership intentionally supports loan applications of only one caste, and not of others. One AC member in one village got nine loans without repaying earlier ones.

The important thing is that leadership has not been sensitive to issues of equity and perceived equity. Ordinary members may lose interest in MM if AC leadership is perceived as self-supporting.

Some structural factors could have also caused this difficulty. In many cases, the norm of AC leadership, that is, one AC member for each set of 10 members is not followed. This ratio becomes as large as 1:25 in the case of one village. Large representation reduces the opportunity for membership involvement and exercising control over leadership. It creates distance between leaders and members.

Another related issue that seems to have strengthened the status of present AC leadership is the fact that many of them have continued in this position for five-six years, some from the very beginning. An effort at rotating leadership periodically may tend to reduce development of vested interests, and increase membership involvement and control.



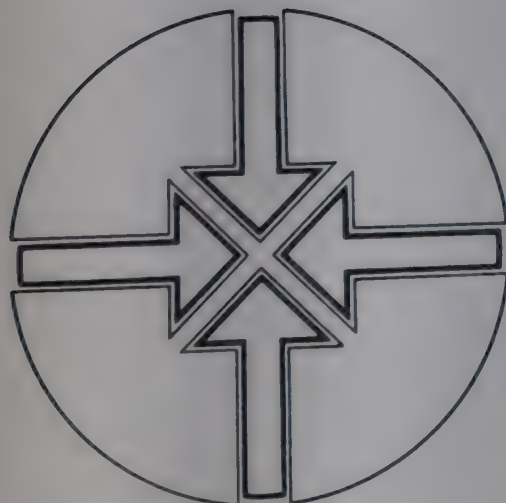
8. **Mahila Mandals have become largely restricted to thrift societies.** Since thrift brought the women together, it remained an important activity of the MMs. However, this thrift has become the sole purpose of many MMs. AC has become the leadership group, both in name and deed. All AC meetings, without a single exception, talk about thrifts, loans and repayments. Most monthly meetings of MMs only discuss loans, repayments and savings. As a consequence, only those interested in loans attend AC or MM meetings; average attendance at MM meetings is less than 20%; most monthly meetings of MMs are not held if VDT senior staff do not come as women say they have nothing to discuss; some women who have outstanding loans in their name shy away from AC meetings and MM meetings as they do not want to be questioned; problems of women and the village as a whole do not get much attention inside or outside the meetings.

Several villages have serious problems of drinking water, lack of electricity, fodder, alcoholism, etc. Though a few MMs have taken some initiative in this regard, this is not a common practice. Some references to these problems have been made in some AC or MM meetings, but no effective discussion or action planning followed. This does not deny some examples of women's actions on other issues of common concern in the village. The point is that MMs, by and large, seem to have focussed on problems of thrift, loans and repayments only.

The confusion between MM membership and that of thrift society also exists. This confusion confounds the boundary between MM and thrift further. And it does not become clear to a woman who is not involved in thrift if she has a place in MM or not. In fact, MMs, as per their activities, seem to be merely thrift promoting and loan giving mechanisms.

9. **Women's Umbrella Organization is a wing of VDT and is not perceived as a women's organization.** Women's Umbrella Organization (WUO) has been mentioned as a women's organization, though the way it is structured and operated, it is a wing of VDT. It is not an umbrella organization of all MMs, nor is seen as the women's own organization. Most women interviewed in the field, including a majority of AC members, associated the loans being given as VDT loans. They did not mention that these loans were being given by WUO, although VDT had planned and hoped that the loans would be seen as WUO loans and not VDT loans. WUO appears to be a conduit for funds and programmes from VDT, not a larger organization of MMs. Even reference to WUO in some meetings appears to be made as VDT operation, and not something created and owned by women and Mahila Mandals themselves. The question is, what is and what should be the identity of Women's Umbrella Organization? Clarity on this will help in furthering the organization.

As the follow-up of this, VDT was then requested to plan the next phase of the programme in the light of these findings, including plans for development and strengthening of its field staff to undertake this programme. The intervening agency was requested to assist VDT in this effort, both by VDT and the donor, which it agreed to do as a follow-up. The entire exercise was spread over a period of eight months and entailed five rounds of field visits by the intervening agency team.



ISSUES

Some of the main issues emerging from this experience are elaborated here:

1. When the initial proposal for evaluation was mooted, VDT seemed in a great hurry to expand its women's programme to an additional 25 villages. The overall time-frame set for the evaluation, initially spanning only four months, was conditioned by this consideration. However, the experience of evaluation, in particular some difficult and penetrating questions raised by the intervening team, seemed to delay the expansion plans. In fact, the follow-up planning as a consequence of evaluation did not proceed as planned, and the intervening agency team was not involved. The initial enthusiasm of VDT seemed to have evaporated by the end of the process.

2. The second issue relates to the coordination of evaluation within VDT. Over the duration of the evaluation, coordination of this exercise in VDT changed hands four times. A woman was initially named by VDT as the key contact for the intervening team. In the second visit, the team discovered that this woman had gone on long leave and a man was now nominated to coordinate the evaluation exercise. During the third visit, the team was told that a third person was coordinating the evaluation since the man had gone away for some training. And finally, the head of VDT himself took over the coordination. This sequence made the task of the intervening agency rather difficult, as each new coordinator did not fully know what the previous one had done. Besides, it also reflected the rather disorganized state of affairs in VDT itself, and the seriousness with which they got involved in the evaluation exercise.



CHARITY BENGAL

CONTEXT

Charity Bengal (CB) is a voluntary agency working in West Bengal for the past 18 years. It has helped small farmers with irrigation and new forms of agriculture over the years. Gradually, it began to realize the importance of educational efforts with the rural poor as an essential component of their programme to improve their situation. The CB project was, therefore, planned initially for a three year period (1979-81) as an educational effort aiming at "empowering people by raising their consciousness level, mobilizing them towards movements, and building up those systems and institutions necessary to ensure that the producer enjoys the fruits of his labour." Since then, the project has been extended for another five years (1982-86) and is currently being implemented in 21 Development Zones of six regions.

Specifically, the objectives of the CB project are stated as follows:

- (i) To train personnel in order to identify, select and train leaders of the partner groups for action programmes.
- (ii) To identify and organize groupwise the exploited sections of society through their involvement and participation in various activities.
- (iii) To involve and organize women's groups for participation in the development process of their families and of the society itself.
- (iv) To help form associations of various partner groups for solidarity and joint activities.

The project is being implemented in 448 villages in 14 districts. Its major work strategy has been the formation of partner groups (PGs) of landless, marginal farmers, women, youth, etc.

PROCESS

Though the initial request for evaluation came from the donor agency, the exercise for this evaluation was carried out in such a manner that the project staff and members of PGs would experience it as a developmental exercise rather than a judgmental one. In order to facilitate this process of participatory evaluation, the CB staff was requested to formulate its own objectives of evaluation, identify priority areas for focus during field visits, select regions, zones and PGs for field visits to ensure a wide range of coverage, and suggest methods of evaluation to ensure involvement of PG members in this exercise. The response of CB staff as well as funders' suggestions, combined to generate the following objectives of evaluation:



- (a) the impact of the project on self-reliance of PGs;
- (b) successes and shortcomings of the project to date;
- (c) organizational viability and motivation of PGs.

The central method of evaluation was through workshops, group discussions and self-assessments. Besides, previous records, reports and documents were also perused. Most of the statistics were provided by project staff, though some, like membership, background information, was collected during the field visits. The project staff had proposed field visits to three regions. These represented three distinct geographical and socio-economic areas and also had variations in the extent of project implementation. In all, 18 PGs (and their members) were met and discussions held with them.

Preliminary findings from the field units were shared with the senior staff at the end of the visits, first in each region, and then in the central office. The discussions, analysis and insights from there were incorporated in the draft of the report prepared by the evaluation team. The CB staff used this draft for further discussions amongst themselves and for preparing future action plans. The intervening agency was not involved in this effort.

SALIENT FINDINGS

1. The organization of partner groups

One of the main tasks under the CB project is to organize people into viable groups which can then initiate their own development. The total number of partner groups (PGs), as these are called, stood at 1028, with a membership of 20,875. Thus, in sheer size and quantity of membership and PGs, this appears to be a considerable effort. The PGs are of several varieties: male landless, marginal farmers, women, youth, children, etc.

2. Achievements

Several significant accomplishments of PGs have been assessed. The major ones are listed below:

- (a) **Increase in social awareness** appears to be an important one. Though variations across membership exist, it is clearly evident that members of PGs have become more aware of their situation, need for unity and solidarity, and taking collective initiatives for their own development. Awareness of prevalence of superstitions and socially unjust practices has also increased among members.
- (b) **Accumulation of savings** by different PGs is another landmark accomplishment of the project. Total accumulated savings currently stood at Rs 28,63,349. Though variations exist across PGs on the rate and volume of savings, it is clear that regular savings have become an integral part of PGs. All members seem to have regularly filled pass books, and weekly/fortnightly PG meetings are occasions for collection of savings. The rate of savings varies from Re 0.50 to



Rs 5.00 per week. Women and youth PGs have also adopted systems of regular savings.

Two important outcomes of this practice of savings have been decreased dependence on outside moneylenders and use of their own resources. Many members belonging to PGs reported getting out of the dependence on local moneylenders, as they now get loans from the savings in PGs. Examples of PGs undertaking small income-generating activities, through partial or full use of their own savings, also abound.

- (c) **Acquisition of skills and knowledge**, particularly in areas of agriculture, pisciculture, poultry, goat-rearing, primary health care, etc., has been another major gain for members of PGs. Obviously there are variations across PGs on the knowledge and skills they have acquired and used, as farmer groups seem to have benefited most consistently as compared to landless groups. Learning to plan and implement their own collective activities was also occasionally visible in a few PGs, and almost all members have learnt how to sign their names.
- (d) **Collective actions against social injustices** have been reported in some cases. The Nischintapur landless group fought against a powerful man's encroachment on their common land and demonstrated in front of the DM's house; the members of several landless groups in another zone struck work for three days to demand a better share in share-cropping arrangements; the members of Pekua village have protested against bank employees taking a cut against the loans granted by them. These examples are only illustrative and indicate the increasing trend of collective actions by PGs.

3. Assessment of partner groups

The variations across PGs in the extent of their organizational viability clearly exist. Field workers in the three regions visited by the evaluation team themselves assessed these PGs. These results indicate that a little more than one-third of the PGs have achieved a good viability. While short duration of existence was one of the main reasons given for weak groups, many of them have also existed for about two years.

A variety of assessment criteria were used by field-workers in making these assessments of PGs. These are identical to many elements of criteria evolved by senior staff of CB at the start of this evaluation. This set of criteria was used by field workers in each of the three regions to assess one PG each. This suggests the feasibility and desirability of this exercise.

4. Issues for consideration

The following main issues were posed for consideration and appropriate action regarding increased organizational viability of PGs:

(a) Diffuse criteria for membership in PGs

There are, broadly speaking, four types of PGs under the CB project: landless male, marginal farmers, women and youth. Besides, some



children's groups and mixed groups also exist. The criteria for membership in these categories of groups are somewhat diffuse. In one zone it was stated that members of landless (male) PGs owning land less than 0.50 acre (including homestead land) were considered and this was strictly adhered to. The land ownership pattern of 16 members present on the meeting of Para Landless Group confirmed this fact. In another zone, the criterion for defining landless was stated as 0.40 acres, but in the meeting of Nazirpara Landless Group two members (including the chairman of the PG) had more land than 0.40 acres. The criteria for defining membership of landless groups in the third region were not stated clearly and precisely.

The criteria for membership of the marginal farmer groups are much more diffuse. Though called marginal and the limit set at three acres, it is not being adhered to in any of the zones visited. This is so even by the admission of field staff.

The situation with respect to youth groups is perhaps worst in this regard. The Jubo Sangh in the first zone is practically controlled by young men of two rich families of the village; it has two share-croppers and one landless man as members; one young boy, a member, is the son of another member.

The focus of the project will be diffused unless precise criteria for membership to PGs are defined and strictly adhered to. Otherwise the PGs are not homogeneous, with membership of common interest.

(b) Socially unjust practices in PGs

The PGs have evolved certain practices within their functioning which perpetuate existing socially unjust practices prevalent in the area. Some illustrations are given here. The rates of interest on loans extended to members from the savings fund of the PGs, though lower than prevalent private moneylending rates, are still often exorbitant. The rates of interest charged by PGs vary from 40% to even 100% per annum.

Similarly, unjust share-cropping arrangements exist in some PGs. Some irrigation groups do not pay the 7:1 share agreed upon (from the previous 9:1).

Another illustration of such practices is mortgaging of land belonging to members. When members take large loans (mostly for unproductive reasons) from the PG funds, their land is kept mortgaged, which the PG then uses for cultivation, and the member cannot get it back before a certain specified period of years. This is happening in all the three regions visited. In essence, this practice implies that the member will not be able to get his land back from mortgage.

Such unjust social practices need to be actively and strongly discouraged to ensure long-term viability of PGs as organizations of the poor.



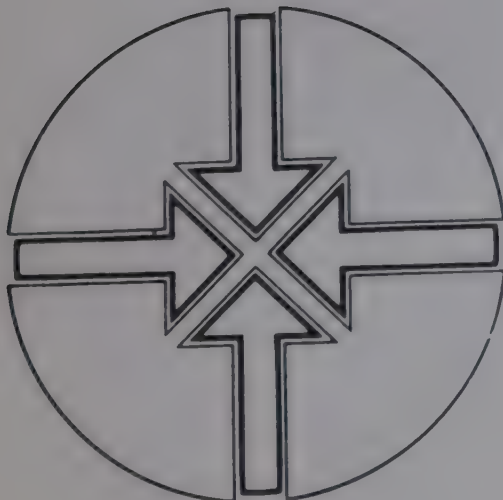
(c) Practices likely to weaken PGs

Some practices in relation to PGs have come to our notice that are likely to weaken their organization unless checked immediately:

- (i) *More than two-thirds of the PGs visited did not have properly written down resolution books.* This is particularly critical in matters relating to loans, rates of interests, sharing of benefits and profits, etc.
- (ii) Implications of decisions made by PGs that appear to be unfair on the motivation of members is critical. *The leadership of many groups seems to enjoy the fruits of being in a group more than the ordinary members.*

In most PGs visited, the chairman and secretary took loans, sometimes in greater amounts than the other members.

- (iii) *Leadership of all PGs is in the hands of the most educated and competent members.* However, these leaders are dominating the members, thereby reducing growth opportunities of others. The views of leaders normally prevail over other members. In many cases, these active, educated and competent persons continue to be in positions of formal leadership (chairman/secretary for periods of a stretch of eight years in a row in some cases).
- (iv) The size of many PGs in terms of membership has remained stagnant and small. The PGs with 10 to 15 members are many in number, particularly landless (average membership 19) and women (average membership 18). Such small numbers are non-viable as far as bargaining power and struggle against social injustices is concerned. *It is important that PGs obtain a collective strength of numbers if they want to influence the existing system.*
- (v) A related issue is that of coverage. In none of the villages (or hamlets) visited had the organizing effort covered all the poor families. In many cases, PGs had been formed in new villages even when many landless and marginal farmer families of previous villages were left out. *From the point-of-view of long-term viability and strength of the organization of PGs, large coverage of geographically contiguous areas is essential.*
- (vi) While the record of accumulated savings has been impressive, it seems that savings orientation is the predominant activity of PGs. A lot of meeting time is spent on collecting savings. The knowledge of members is better regarding savings than any other activity of the PGs. *Most members lacked an understanding of the empowering role of PGs, though they all knew its savings role.* Even reporting by field workers and regions (according to a format prescribed by the central office) gives a predominant position to savings.



It is, therefore, desirable that less emphasis, relatively speaking, is given to savings and it is seen only as a means, not an end, of strengthening PGs.

ISSUES

Several challenging issues in the process of evaluation emerged from this experience. Some of these are highlighted here.

1. One of the main issues related to the composition of the team of facilitators of the evaluation. The three-member team comprised of a woman social scientist of the region (to ensure a clear focus on organizing women and smooth rapport-building with poor women), an ex-staff member of CB (as one involved in previous evaluations and knowledgeable about CB, its staff and programmes, as well as trusted by them), and

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING PARTNER GROUPS

These criteria were developed in workshops with the CB central office and field staff, and each PG was assessed on these by the concerned staff.

1. Composition

- (a) Minimum 15 members, maximum 30 (fixed membership). Ensure participation if larger number.
- (b) Regular annual general meeting and elections.
- (c) Capable board/committee (minimum three persons).
- (d) Homogeneous (commonality of interests) membership: sex, occupation.

2. Income generating activities

- (a) Undertaking small pilot projects with their own funds.
- (b) Undertaking projects with the support of government programmes.
- (c) Undertaking projects with the support of other donor projects.
- (d) Noticeable individual and collective economic improvement.
- (e) Equitable distribution of resources among members.
- (f) Judicious use of own savings and local resources.

3. Other actions

- (a) Concerted action against social injustices.
- (b) Cultural activities.
- (c) Collective action against superstitions and vices.
- (d) Being recognized locally.

4. Linkage with other groups

- (a) Organizing campaigns and rallies.
- (b) Attending meetings of other groups.
- (c) Resolving local conflicts.
- (d) Having multiplier effect on other groups.
- (e) Interpersonal relationship characterized by mutual trust.
- (f) At least 10% literate members over a period of time.



a representative of a resource agency (proposed by the donor). Building a working relationship among the team of these facilitators was one of the main tasks in the early stages of evaluation.

2. The second issue related to the involvement of different levels of staff in CB. As a large and well established voluntary agency, the internal hierarchy of roles and responsibilities was well defined. To ensure free and open expression of opinions and perceptions by all staff, and to promote enhanced participation of field workers in the evaluation exercise, deliberate attempts were made to structure workshops of the same level of staff, and create distinct information sharing and analysis forums for different categories of staff, to minimize the effects of hierarchy. Such forums were created in the field as well as in the head office.

Another method used in this regard was to ask various levels of staff to develop, individually and collectively, criteria for assessing the effectiveness and strength of partner groups (PGs). These criteria were then con-

5. Organizational skills

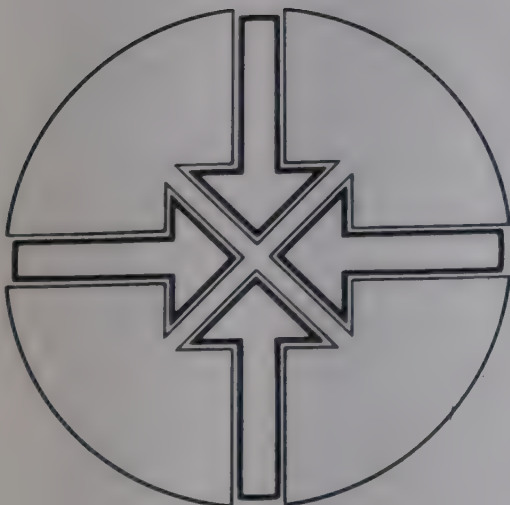
- (a) Regular meetings.
- (b) Regular attendance.
- (c) Active participation of all members in discussions and decision-making.
- (d) Growth of effective and shared leadership and members' control over it.
- (e) Deliberations recorded.
- (f) Follow-up of decisions made.
- (g) Regular savings.
- (h) Accounts clearly maintained.
- (i) Funds deposited in safe custody.
- (j) Procedures followed with rotating moderator.
- (k) Ability to withstand crisis.
- (l) Discussion of common and serious village issues in meetings.

6. Level of awareness

- (a) Identification of local money-lenders, touts, Union Parishad Chairman and Members.
- (b) Existing local government facilities and programmes.
- (c) Land ownership and related systems and procedures.
- (d) Local social system and prevailing social injustices (e.g., dowry) and their underlying causes.
- (e) Knowledge of legal rights (e.g., Minimum Wages Act, Dowry Act, etc.).
- (f) Importance of sending children to school (also sending them).
- (g) Knowledge of preventive health care.
- (h) Identification of class stratification.
- (i) Knowledge of what is going on in the country.
- (j) Knowledge of what is happening outside the country.
- (k) Encouragement to spouses to join groups.
- (l) Understanding implications of registration.

7. Training of members

- (a) At least one cadre from the group.
- (b) At least one member trained in some skills.
- (c) Having planned educational component in their activities.
- (d) Acquisition of skills to evaluate their own group.
- (e) Ability to plan and implement the project.



solidated and utilized for assessing PGs. The assessment of PGs on the basis of these criteria were first made by the field workers themselves, and then discussed with their supervisors, who had also made independent assessments of the PGs on the same criteria. This process also ensured widespread reflection and analysis among field workers.

3. Another issue related to the process of building a collective group in CB as the main implementors of the evaluation exercise. The regional office and head office represented distinct units of CB. Since the programme was spread all over, it was felt important to include Regional Directors and their colleagues, alongwith key head office staff in the entire evaluation process. Thus a 25-person key-members' group was established within CB to be involved in the evaluation exercise as key implementors. The setting up of objectives of evaluation was initially done by this group; the feedback of initial findings and tentative analysis was also shared with this group. Identifying and involving, these key members of CB individually and collectively, was a critical aspect of the evaluation exercise.



ANDHRA PRADESH BALWADI PROGRAMME

BACKGROUND

Andhra Pradesh Balwadi Programme (APBP) is a programme of non-formal education and supplementary nutrition being conducted by the Diocese in a backward district of Andhra Pradesh. The programme has been in existence for the past six years and has operated in about 200 villages of the district. The programme entails running of about 220 Balwadis for the pre-school children of the rural poor. A teacher runs the Balwadi, assisted by a Sevika. Children attending the Balwadi are given food for nutritional purposes. For every 20 Balwadis or so, a supervisor is available to guide the teachers. Balwadis have been used to help build rapport in the community and improve the educational level of the children of the rural poor.

An intervening agency was approached by the donor to evaluate this programme. The director of APBP subsequently held consultations with the intervening agency before the evaluation process started.

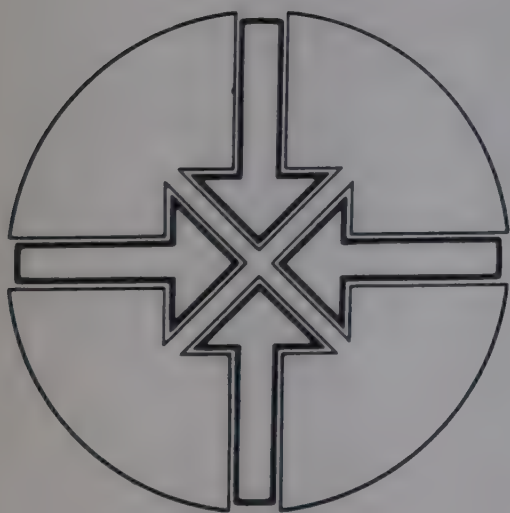
PROCESS

This evaluation exercise was carried out in three broad steps:

1 An initial visit to the field by a member of the intervening agency was made for eight to 10 days. During this visit, the facilitator discussed the process of evaluation with the core team, parish priests and sisters, some supervisors and teachers of the Balwadi.

The objectives of evaluation, the involvement of people in the evaluation process, the methods to be used were all decided along with the core team. It was decided that this core team will be responsible for carrying out bulk of the evaluation exercise, including initial data collection.

A guideline was given by the facilitator to the core team to be used in the next three-four months when they were collecting information from parish priests and sisters, Balwadi teachers and supervisors, members of Catholic Sabha and Mahila Sangh.



After this, the core team met the parish priests as a group. Almost all the parish priests came for this meeting. A small questionnaire was also sent to the core team to be filled in by the parish priests. (All the parish priests replied, except one.)

The questionnaire was also sent to the sisters but they did not reply because they felt that the Balwadi is a responsibility of the parish priests. They did not see their own role in the evaluation process.

One of the core team members met the Balwadi teachers and supervisors, parish-wise and spoke to them about the evaluation process and their role in it. Some initial data collection was done from this group too.

Efforts were also made by the core team members to meet the Mahila Sangh and the Catholic Sabha but this was possible only in four parishes.

2 A team of two facilitators made the second visit after five months to visit Balwadis and meet the children and teachers.

A day-long meeting of all Balwadi teachers and supervisors was organized. Almost 120 teachers and supervisors (out of the total strength of 220) came for the meeting. Twenty one parishes out of 28) were represented.

The teachers and supervisors were asked to individually write down five characteristics of a good Balwadi, discuss it in their own parish group and then present it to the larger group. A summarization led to a consolidated set of characteristics. The teachers then sat in their own groups, along with their supervisors, to see how far these characteristics were present in their own Balwadis. They did this exercise individually, then discussed it in their own groups. The groups also discussed how they could improve the situation in each of the Balwadis. After each group came to a consensus, it presented suggestions to the larger group. The facilitators tabulated these for the larger group, aggregated them and facilitated collective reflection on the data so generated.

In one parish the facilitators were able to meet the Catholic Sabha members and Mahila Sangh members. Children of some of the members were attending the Balwadi. The discussions with these groups focussed upon the purposes and effectiveness of the Balwadi programme.

The facilitators also interviewed the core team members in order to obtain their perception of the Balwadi programme.

3 A draft report of the evaluation process was then prepared by the facilitators and sent to the core team. This was followed by another visit by one of the facilitators to discuss the draft report. During this time the facilitator also met two additional groups of Mahila Sangh and a Catholic Sabha. The facilitator also visited three Balwadis and met some parish priests there. A final report was then prepared based on these deliberations and field visits. The core team has since used it to plan their future programme activities.



KEY FINDINGS

1. On the whole it was seen that children have benefited after attending the Balwadi

Almost all the parish priests who replied to the questionnaire felt that the children had benefited from attending the Balwadi, though some felt that it served the purpose partially. Teachers, supervisors, Catholic Sabha and Mahila Sanghs also felt Balwadis had a positive effect on the children. On visiting the Balwadis one could see the enthusiasm and interest of the children.

Effects on the children could be compared in the Balwadi itself. In the class, they would very eagerly talk and answer to questions; recite poems based on local themes, stories close to their life-situations; do simple addition and subtraction with the use of local aids; talk with confidence to facilitators who were outsiders.

In comparison, the newer children were shy, afraid to talk, sat quietly in a corner, and the teacher had to make efforts to involve them in the class.

2. Children going to Balwadis adjust easily into the formal school system

Parish priests felt that children coming from Balwadis were mentally prepared to come to the school, hence could adjust easily. They learnt faster than others as they had gone through a systematized learning process. The teachers found it easier to teach these children and were appreciative of the Balwadi programme.

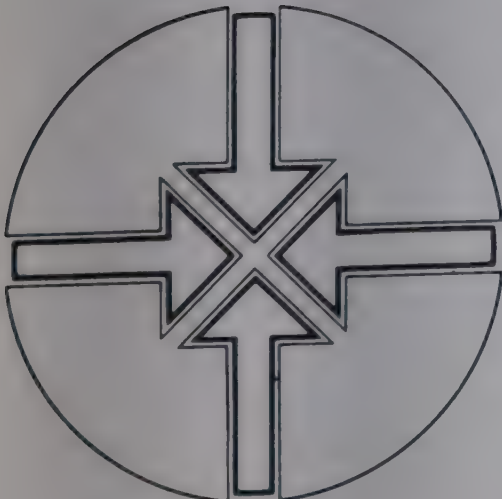
3. Nutrition programme seemed to have benefited the health of the children to some extent

Parents, Catholic Sabha, Mahila Sanghs and teachers feel that the quantity of food given under the nutrition programme should be more. They feel the present quantity is not enough and the child remains hungry. They also feel there should be more variety in food so that the children enjoy what they are eating, and do not get bored eating the same thing everyday.

Some feelings were also expressed in terms of the type of food being given as to how similar it was to their normal eating habits.

The staple food of the area is rice. In the Balwadis, children are given wheat preparations. Children do not like it and also the parents feel their children remain hungry. One of the villagers points out if the child gets used to some non-customary food and new food habits, and develops a taste for that, how will the mother satisfy him/her later when he/she leaves the Balwadi.

A local committee of three village men exists to look after the nutrition programme. Wheat or other such cereals are given by the parish. In the beginning it was planned that wheat would be bought by the villagers but later the parish priests felt that money could be saved if the wheat was bought in bulk by them and then given to the villagers. The job of the



committee is to bring the wheat from the parish to the community. Other materials are to be bought from the market for which money is given to the committee. Since the members do not see it as their programme, they just implement whatever the parish priest says and do not take much interest.

It is normally the mother's role and duty to look after the child's health, but the local committee does not have any women. This also affects the functioning of this programme.

The quantity of food given is not enough for older children and for those who come from far off villages whereas it is more for smaller children. There is a need to distribute the meal according to the needs of the children.

4. Local people have not been involved in running the Balwadi

It was seen that the Balwadi programme is largely viewed as an end in itself. Very little efforts have so far been made to integrate this programme with the other programmes of the parish. Each programme was seen as a separate unit.

Local groups like the Catholic Sabha and Mahila Sangh exist but little efforts have been made to involve them in taking responsibility for the Balwadi programme. When members of the intervening agency met both these groups in three parishes they said they never had an opportunity to think as to what they could do and also no one had asked them. Since they had never thought of this before, they concretely wanted to know how they could help out and take responsibility.

The core team has decided to make efforts to involve these groups.

ISSUES

Some of the interesting issues arising out of this experience were:

1. The large size and widespread of the Balwadi programme posed a major question in planning the evaluation. Since the impact of the programme was the main focus of evaluation, it was felt necessary to cover, as widely as possible, the programme area and staff. Hence, much of the initial data collection responsibility had to be shared by the core team of the programme. Also it was necessary to design a simple questionnaire which could then be used to elicit information from all the Balwadi teachers. This meant that the intervening agency and its team of facilitators had to spend more time in the preparation of the core team members, both in terms of playing their role, and in developing the necessary skills needed for performing that role effectively.

2. Another issue, related to the task of the intervening agency, was the special situation obtaining in a Diocese-sponsored development programme. The structure, norms and procedures, obtaining in the diocese are rather tightly laid down and followed, and the facilitators had no prior experience of the same. Even the hierarchy is so well defined, like between



priests and sisters, that the facilitation of critical reflection was a difficult task. Separate events, informal conversations and structured questionnaires — a wide variety of ways of collecting information — had to be utilized in order to develop a holistic understanding of the situation and to facilitate a process of critical reflection among various categories of staff.



RURAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

CONTEXT

Rural Development Organization (RDO) began its work in the mid seventies with a focus on conscientization and organization of socially and economically deprived and exploited sections of the society. The major thrust of their initial work was to give a voice to the voiceless and power to the powerless. RDO started its work in 1975 through one field centre in five villages in one of the most backward districts of Madhya Pradesh. In 1979-80, it established two other field centres and in 1984, it once again expanded into new areas.

In fact, 1975-79, 1979-84 and 1984 onwards are three distinct phases in the development of RDO. During each of these phases, several internal and external evaluations of RDO took place, and a considerable amount of written material on its strategy, philosophy and programmes is available. It has come to be recognized in India and outside as a pioneer in operationalizing conscientization and organization model. With a successful campaign of political education and building up of people's organization in the field areas during the first two phases (i.e. 1975-84), it has not only expanded its work in 350 villages, but has also started some socio-economic and health programmes alongwith people's organization. The introduction of socio-economic programmes in the third phase started having some repercussions on the organizational functioning and work culture.

At this juncture, at a meeting of RDO representatives and representatives of major funders of RDO, it was felt, if through a process of participatory evaluation a perspective and organizational strategy for the next ten years could be evolved, it would help in programme planning and facilitate composite funding for ten years. In this meeting, after a mutual agreement between RDO and its donors on the above need, an agreement was reached on the names of three potential agencies in India, one of which could play a facilitator role for the proposed process of participatory evaluation.

By the time follow-up action was taken on the agreements reached at this meeting and the potential agencies contacted, RDO was facing some problems from the government and restrictions were put on the organization on receipt of funds; its records were sealed by government officials and an enquiry was set up. This intensified the brewing tension in the



organization caused by the pressure of organizational functioning and conflicts of work culture in its third phase. Due to the uncertainty created by this new crisis, most of the people in the organization were apprehensive about the future, when the first planning meeting was organized between the intervening agency and the senior staff of RDO. The planning meeting was attended by a team from the intervening agency, representatives of other partners of RDO, a tentative representative of donors and senior staff of RDO. Apart from setting-up objectives of the proposed evaluation and developing the frame of reference, a detailed time schedule was also prepared. The objectives of evaluation derived in this meeting were as follows: —

- (i) To assess the model followed by RDO as a mechanism for people's empowerment;
- (ii) To assess the relevance of different programmes in this model; and
- (iii) To assess the appropriateness of the organizational form of RDO.

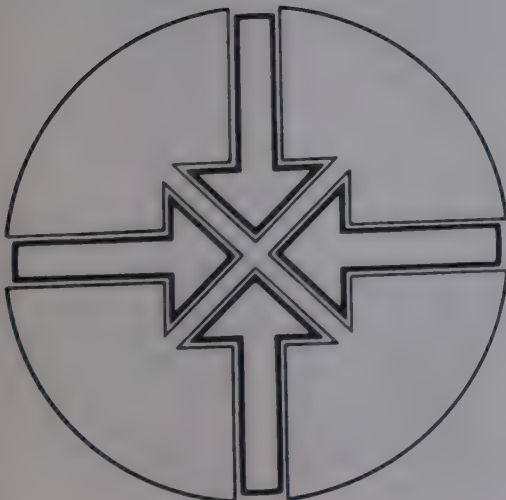
THE PROCESS

With the above objectives in mind, it was felt that the evaluation should focus on the experiences of the model followed by RDO as a model of development (i.e. conscientization-organization model) and examine RDO's programmes and organizational structures in that light. Thus, the essential thrust of the evaluation was not on assessing impact of the programmes on the beneficiaries, but on the viability and applicability of the model and its appropriate supportive structures.

At the end of the meeting, some questions were raised regarding the suitability of the time-frame for the proposed evaluation process, in the light of the crisis RDO was facing. After careful thinking, based on the assessment of RDO staff present at the meeting, it was decided that the evaluation team would visit selected field areas and discuss the basic tenets of participatory evaluation with responsible area staff members and carry the evaluation process forward, taking stock of their reactions.

As per this understanding, the evaluation teams visited the areas and held meetings with the area staff. These meetings were quite useful in terms of building confidence among the staff members to candidly assess the need for a participatory evaluation and the appropriateness of the time-frame in conducting the same. In the course of the deliberations, it became clear that the staff was unmoved by the present crisis and was ready to join in the evaluation if their participation was ensured till the finalization of the report and planning of follow-up action.

Some of the staff considered the proposed evaluation as an exercise to merely satisfy the formalities of the donors and their organizations. They said that this consideration was based on their past experiences when they neither saw the reports, nor saw any actions flowing out of earlier evaluations. However, with repeated assurances of discussing the draft report with them before finalizing it, the evaluation team won their confidence in some places; and in other places, some staff members were still



doubtful and wanted to assess the credibility of the evaluation team. This visit of the evaluation team was thus quite fruitful in creating an environment for carrying out the evaluation process.

After discussing these impressions with the Executive Director and the Acting Executive Director, it was decided to go ahead with the process. The dates for the next visit of different members of the evaluation team were finalized and the Acting Executive Director, who was made incharge of coordinating the work with the evaluation team, was informed.

During the second visit, as scheduled, the scenario had drastically changed. No one from RDO concerned with the evaluation process was available. One of the evaluation team members proceeded to the area as per schedule on her own, and interviewed some of the staff. Another member reached afterwards but could not achieve much because of the prevailing state of confusion due to the legal crisis still facing RDO, coupled with flood relief work and some dynamics in the organization unknown to the evaluation team till then. Perhaps, the dynamics was escalating faster due to the prevailing uncertainty in the organization. After prolonged discussion with the Acting Director, the next visits were planned and an assurance was given that all arrangements would be made for the extensive field programme of the evaluation team.

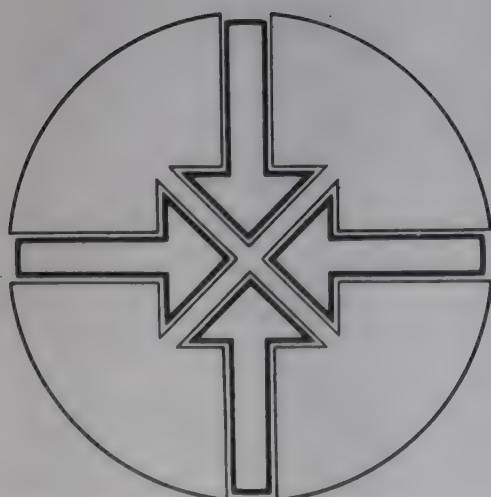
In the meantime the resource person involved in facilitating the evaluation process for the social forestry programme had fixed a meeting of concerned staff members in order to initiate the process. The internal conflicts and dynamics among senior RDO staff somehow stalled the process from moving further and the concerned resource person was forced to withdraw from the evaluation process.

The interesting point at this juncture was that most of the responsible people in RDO were neither ready to take a stand to suspend the process of evaluation, nor were they comfortable about it continuing since they were not able to assess the possible outcomes of the exercise and its impact. With everybody overtly accepting the importance of participatory evaluation exercise, promising all cooperation in future, and apologetically regretting the futility of the last two visits, it became a "Catch-22" situation for the team from the intervening agency. The agency could neither back out from the exercise on its own initiative, nor do anything to expedite the process. "Wait and watch" was the only line of action left to deal with the situation.

In order to keep the records straight, the Acting Director of RDO was reminded of the coming visit of the team along with his assurances and two formats seeking some information.

STRAINS ON THE PROCESS

On the arrival of the evaluation team for the scheduled visit, the team, to its utter surprise was told that the process of evaluation was suspended at the instance of the donors as they wanted the process to continue only in the presence of their representatives. No information to this effect was sent to the intervening agency. On enquiry, it was revealed that the



decision to suspend the evaluation was made a week before this visit of the team, but for reasons unknown till today, it was not communicated to the facilitating agency.

This belated reaction of the representatives of donors on the issue of frames of reference and on the participation of donors further confounded the already prevailing air of mistrust and confusion within RDO regarding this evaluation. In fact, this intervention, leading to the postponement of the evaluation process, had severely affected the basic fabric of participation based on mutual respect and trust among the concerned parties. The displeasure of the facilitating agency was duly communicated to all concerned parties.

REVELATION OF AGENDAS

After a lapse of two months a meeting was organized to sort out the misunderstanding among the concerned parties. But the meeting turned out to be a revelation of the covert purposes of evaluation which had not been made explicit till then. The issue of the appropriateness of the time being conducive for evaluation of RDO was not raised by anyone. Only the issue of the donors' participation with the evaluation team during field visits for data-collection was raised. The arguments given in support of the donors' participation in the whole process of evaluation implied that if evaluation is done in their absence, it would not be credible enough to convince the Board of Directors of the donor organizations and the philanthropic organizations supporting them. This problem of convincing the Board of Directors of donors and philanthropic organizations was neither mentioned as one of the objectives of the proposed evaluation during the consultation nor was communicated prior to this meeting.

The facilitating agency was taken by surprise on this matter and took a stand in this meeting that the involvement of the donor and philanthropic organizations in the evaluation exercise at this stage and the prevailing situation in RDO can be accepted till the headquarters level and at the stage of planning and finalizing the process only. The facilitating agency made it clear in this meeting that it had agreed to take up this task because the objectives of evaluation implied assisting RDO to take stock of its past experiences and to plan for the future and because of the mutual trust reposed in the agency by RDO and the donor organizations. Opening up of new frontiers at this late stage had belied both the premises of the involvement of the facilitating agency. At the same time, the facilitating agency was not interested in withdrawing its support to a fraternal organization when it was under attack from the government. This dilemma was finally resolved through a compromise. It was decided that the donors would send their team separately, which would be joined by some representatives of the philanthropic organizations and some others. The findings would be shared with the facilitating agency. Somehow the deadlock was removed through this compromise.



NEW PHASE

Sensing the problems caused by the six month long postponement, and the developments within the organization caused by external pressures and internal dynamics, the facilitating team decided to prepare questionnaires for different levels of staff, village council members and formats for programme and village council profiles. The team had also prepared guidelines for indepth study of selected village councils. In effect, the team changed its method of collecting information from group discussion, collective and individual reflection (which were used in the first phase of evaluation) to relatively more structured methods of information collection.

But when the team reached RDO, it was confronted with a new situation once again. In the briefing from the Executive Director, the team was told to extend the period of evaluation since the retrenchment of animators/teachers had created new tensions in the organization. The team was told that teachers were given compensation according to rule and asked to leave and, as a result of dissatisfaction caused by such an action, they were spreading rumours among the people. The Executive Director felt that in such a situation, the information the team collected might be prejudiced.

At this stage the team explained to him that during this visit they had planned to concentrate on collecting information from the staff only, and would not be holding group discussions with council members and other villagers. With this understanding, the team proceeded to the field. During the team's encounter with the staff, with whom the team had developed a good rapport initially, they were asked a lot of questions regarding the validity of the present process of evaluation in the context of the happenings of the last few months. They were also doubtful about the *locus standi* of the team on the basis of their observations during the visit of the donors' team. They put forward straight questions to the team about an assurance of implementation of recommendations made by this evaluation, even if they cooperated with it. This was quite a learning experience for the team in terms of understanding the limitations of the evaluation.

The deliberations with the staff members revealed that a lot of actions were being initiated by those managing RDO, regarding which the facilitating team had been kept in the dark. Such actions on the part of the management of RDO had changed the environment in the organization. There was polarization around the issue of termination of teachers and reorganization proposed by the management. Most of the staff were only interested in discussing these issues and proposed to hold a general meeting for that purpose.

The state of RDO at this stage was characterized by serious internal conflicts among senior staff and the Executive Director, extreme mutual mistrust, and strategizing and counter-strategizing among warring factions.

Hence during this visit as well, the team could only carry out its scheduled work for four days while the rest of the five days the team



simply observed the highly charged activity generated by the proposed meeting. Though this forced observation exercise was quite a learning experience for the team in terms of developing insights into the internal dynamics and decision-making process of the organization, and was an important input to the evaluation exercise, but as a consequence, the team's renewed attempts for systematic data-collection became a casualty once again.

At this stage, the evaluation team felt frustrated and doubtful about the intentions of the concerned parties regarding the completion of this exercise. The team raised the issue with concerned persons and requested them to raise the issue in the forthcoming RDO governing body meeting and let the facilitating agency know what the stand of the organization was at the earliest. The team proposed to hold a meeting of all senior and important staff of RDO to discuss the present state of affairs. The team felt that such a meeting, apart from being an exercise to close the evaluation process, might also help in overcoming the stalemate faced by the organization then, and temporarily managing the conflicts.

On receiving a green signal from them, such a meeting was finally held in which some critical decisions were taken to phase out the then crisis the organization was faced with.

The above description gives an idea of stresses and strains which has an effect on realizing the expected levels of participation of staff in the evaluation process and the originally planned expected objectives of the evaluation. This account of events also brings out the limitations of an external facilitating agency in sustaining a participatory evaluation process.

Based on the information collected in this process, a detailed report was prepared and presented at a meeting, which was attended by 40 persons including the RDO governing body members, senior and important staff of RDO and the evaluation team members. Summary observations of the report are given below.

OVERALL FINDINGS

1. According to the original vision of RDO, it was expected to distinguish between the organization committed to the promotion of people's movement and the people's organization created through its efforts. Such a conceptualization is visible in the initial documents, but it seems that this distinction got lost somewhere along the line.

This appears to be the **main issue** affecting the growth of village councils as stronger people's organizations, effectiveness of programmes, and confusion regarding organizational structure and functioning at different levels. Over the years, *the distinction between village councils as people's movement and RDO as a promotion organization got blurred*. As a result, people's representatives and forums above cluster level got intermixed with RDO area staff; animators originally developed as leaders from village councils became identified, and treated, as RDO staff; the



strengthening of people's organization, and appropriate structures at a broader level, beyond a certain area, could not take place. Many animators and other staff began to equate the RDO Central Office with the central decision-making forum of the people.

It is this blurring of distinction that needs to be critically looked into and immediately clarified. Other actions can then follow from this.

2. *This has led to cooption of people's leadership developed through investing a lot of energy, resources, and time into the formal structure of an organization performing a promotional role.* Such induction of people's leaders in an institutional structure has perhaps not only created dual aspirations among such staff but also helped nurture misunderstanding among village council members. The duality of aspirations had further affected the internal dynamics of the organization.

On the one hand, village council animators and cluster coordinators were acting as spokespersons of the people's organization; on the other hand, they were subjected to, and became socialized into, RDO organizational structure and style of functioning within the overall context.

Many of these people experienced tensions and conflicts within themselves around this duality; and acting on that confusion led to intermingling of roles – acting as people's representatives in staff meetings and as RDO staff in village council and cluster meetings.

3. Rapid programmatic and geographic expansion of RDO activities in its Third Phase (1984) further accentuated this situation. The demands for such expansion implied transfer of senior and experienced staff to start work in new areas, recruitment of technical and professional staff, and a large number of new field staff. This expansion appears not to have been planned very well and as a result, *necessary orientation and integration of new staff could not take place.* The third phase of RDO activities could not be comprehended by the new staff within the historical context of the earlier two phases; and the old staff, equipped to function effectively in those previous phases, could not be reoriented to take on the responsibilities of the new phase.

The growth of RDO, apparently less than well planned, further sharpened internal and external contradictions and conflicts.

4. *The organizational and personnel management style evolved during the process of working in a relatively smaller area, with focus on conscientization, organization and action was not reviewed and changed to adjust to the requirements of a large organization taking up development programmes also.* Even the older staff members were not prepared or trained in planning, proposal developing, monitoring etc.

The structures of decision-making, participation, mutual interaction and consultation that were appropriate during the previous phases were no longer fully relevant in the changed context. Similarly, planning, budgeting and control systems, previously appropriate, were not revised in the light of the new demands of tasks and people.



5. The strategy adapted to cope with the new programmes in the expansion phase was to introduce the Technical Team model. Such a change in structure in a social organization needs to be carefully discussed so that the people involved could internalize it and contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of the organization. Somehow it seems there is a lack of clarity about the objectives of such an important change in structure.

As is explained in some of the documents, the reason for such a change was dual in nature, i.e. to deal with the growing regional feelings, and to cope with the skill development requirements of the new thrust. The net result was resistance from the people and older staff in areas. This change could be fully effected in only one among the three old areas, and another area developed a via-media of maintaining people's structure along with Technical Team model.

The changes brought about in this structure appear to have contributed to further blurring of the boundary between People's Organization and Promotional Organization. The new demands perhaps necessitated changes in RDO staff structure, but the net effect was a change in people's organizational structure.

6. The major impact of such a change was on horizontal communication between people's bodies, which seems essential for consolidation of people's movement. With the introduction of the Technical Team model, no natural forum was left for the village council members of one village to meet their counterparts from another village in the same cluster/area, at their own initiative. The only communication channel left open was through RDO staff. This placed the responsibility of running and consolidating people's organization on RDO without much participation of people's leaders.

Another effect of this change was felt on those who were village council members in the past and were first made animators and then regional coordinators, or on those who were village council leaders first and then coopted as regional coordinators. These people, when asked to acquire some or the other skill in order to change their role to Technical Team members, found it difficult to cope with it in the short span of time available. As a result, it appears to have overloaded them in terms of coverage; also it did not match their personal goals based on the dual aspirations referred to earlier. The resistance caused by this process of change has affected the functioning of the organization. This has also led to mistrust and suspicion among the staff at different levels, and polarization of different categories of people in RDO and village councils.



7. The organizational and personnel management style referred to earlier, in the highly polarized and changed context of these developments, led to a decline of democratic norms of organizational functioning. The role of a few committees left with people's representatives, i.e. steering committees, in decision-making gradually declined. The decision-making powers, for all practical purposes, were concentrated at the top. Detailed information regarding planned proposals and budgets initially used to be taken to the village council and discussed in order to set up democratic norms in the organization. Now, they had stopped even

reaching the staff. This style of management developed in all areas, including personnel, financial, administrative and inter-personal aspects.

Most of the area coordinators have also tried to imitate the same style in their areas, which has made things worse. The only mode of information flow developed due to such a style reflected a "closed door policy", wherein only the policy makers knew of the various related issues, while all others were in the dark. As things stand now, the flow of information has become very restricted and personalized. This has also contributed to speculation, rumour, distortion, and inter-personal mistrust and distancing. The prevailing system of information flow and decision-making could not cope with the changing demands of the new phase, and over-centralization became the response to the resulting chaos and confusion.

The development of various economic and social programmes did not occur on the explicit premise of continuously strengthening people's organization and movement. As a result, many economic and skill building programmes have been initiated in such a manner and at such a pace that the promotional role of RDO (in conscientization and mobilization) got gradually replaced by service-provider role.

The loan programme, in particular, became the focal point of village councils, and its expansion, as opposed to that of village council membership and strength, took precedence.

Evolution and use of various socio-economic programmes in support of strengthening people's organization and movement somehow got diffused. And, as a result, programmes became the primary task, not the village councils and their higher level structures.

The programme was conceived and implemented in all the areas – old and new – almost uniformly, without reference to specific requirements and needs of a particular village council, region or area. The stereotyping of programming had further reduced the possibility of utilizing the programmes to strengthen people's organization.

In sum, the RDO experience demonstrates the viability, and even desirability, of building people's organizations, and village councils as their base structures. The programmes and structures of RDO promotional organization need to be distinguished from the people's organization and movement. It is in rearticulation, and consequent reformation, of this strategy that the future direction of people's organization and RDO as a promotional organization should be attempted.

These observations were discussed at length during the meeting and there was a general agreement on all the points. It was resolved in that meeting to translate the whole report in Hindi and discuss it at various levels in the organization. Planning of the action to be taken was deferred in this light, to be done after the discussion.

The intervening agency did not receive any communication after this, hence its role came to an end at this stage.



ISSUES

This experience brings out a number of issues related to the understanding of participatory evaluation. These issues on one hand highlight some essential points to be followed in a participatory evaluation exercise and on the other, illuminate some limitations of participatory evaluation. We are attempting to put down some of these issues here for the purpose of further discussion.

1. Explicit statement of objectives of a proposed participatory evaluation exercise by all the concerned parties (constituencies) related to the organization's work is essential for carrying out the participatory process. Any room for possible reinterpretation of objectives in between or imposition of new objectives by one or a few parties alone, is bound to hamper the participatory process. Hence, it is better to initially spend some more time in setting up the objectives, explanation and interpretation of each objective etc. with all the concerned parties, in order to ensure an uninterrupted participatory process later on.

2. Working out a detailed "memorandum of understanding" acceptable to all concerned is also essential, however bureaucratic it may sound on the face of it. Such an understanding may entail roles and responsibilities of each party and individuals involved in the participatory evaluation exercise. It may also incorporate an understanding regarding communication of all important decisions taken in the organization during the time of the participatory evaluation exercise to all concerned. On the whole, based on the merits of the case in hand, it may incorporate all those details regarding the understanding among the concerned constituencies which have potentials of distorting or interrupting the participatory process.

This practice is quite common in sectors other than ours. Due to our utter dislike for structured and formal functioning we tend to generally ignore working meticulously on this aspect. Since, most organizations in our sector also operate in a multiple constituency systems and the participatory evaluation process entails involvement of most of the constituencies the organization deals with, it is always better to create a clarity of understanding at the outset. The elements of misunderstanding, mistrust and confusion among the concerned constituencies cropping up during the process defeats the whole purpose; hence it is essential for us to come to terms with this bit of formalism. Our experiences in recent years indicate a welcome trend of organizations initiating participatory evaluation on their own, without anybody asking them. This trend needs to be encouraged further.



3. Another issue relates to the stakes which the organization has in evaluation and its impact on participatory evaluation. Participatory evaluation is an exercise of critical reflection leading to strengthening the vision, organization and programmes. A situation where there are no stakes involved will doubtlessly be the ideal situation for such critical reflections. But in practice such ideal situations often do not exist. Hence participatory evaluation faces the challenge of coming to terms with, or coping with,

the actual situation of vested interests in any proposed exercise . The experience shows that the two points mentioned above, regarding explicit statement of objectives, and formulating memorandum of understanding, do help in coping with such a challenge. It was found that such efforts may yield the desired result at the top level of the organization which on its own do not percolate to various levels. Hence some cautious, deliberate and effective efforts need to be built in the process itself, so that the restricting effect of the stakes in evaluation on the process of critical reflection could be minimized at all levels of the organization and among all constituencies involved.

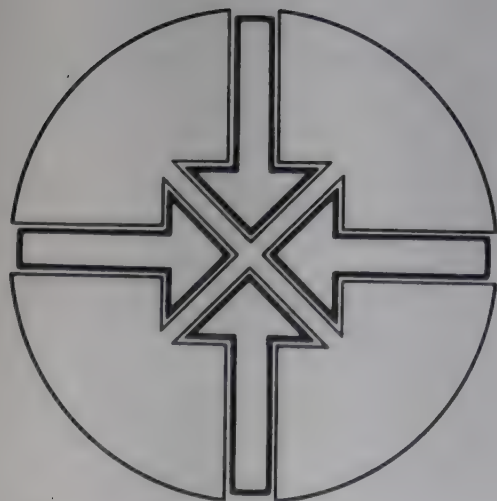
4. The environment in the organization is another issue of concern in the context of participatory evaluation. The case presented here had an organizational environment of tension and mistrust which got polarized during the process of evaluation due to external factors and leadership response to those factors.

Experience in this case and some other cases shows that in such a situation the process of participatory evaluation can be very helpful in coping with the situation if the organization's functioning is non-bureaucratic and the structure is non-hierarchical. But in a hierarchical and bureaucratic organization, even in normal circumstances it becomes difficult to carry out a participatory process. Though it is hard to say at this stage whether this is a strength or weakness of participatory methodology, but certainly coping with the inherited resistance of bureaucratic and hierarchical system is a challenge which we face in varying degrees at various times.

5. If we agree that any participatory evaluation exercise should essentially result in action for change, the question of the organization's "willingness to act" becomes very important. In the absence of such a will, even a participatory exercise will tend to become routine; particularly if it deals with organizational issues of perspective, structures and work culture etc. The action for change in this context amounts to organizational development intervention and thus, even the role of the intervening agency becomes crucial. So the willingness and readiness of the organization and the acceptance and competence of the intervening agency holds the key for such desired organizational development intervention.

6. In a participatory evaluation exercise, the choice of appropriate techniques of data/information collection is another crucial area. Perhaps the rationale for the choice of techniques should be to promote the involvement of the people at various levels of the organization's work. This makes it imperative that the choice of technique for different levels has to be different. The selected technique has to be appropriate to the level it is going to be used at. Hence, flexibility in the choice of techniques is essential for a successful participatory process.

This requirement places extra demands on the facilitating team of having a command over all the techniques, so that it could use appropriate ones whenever and wherever required.



JAGRITI

CONTEXT

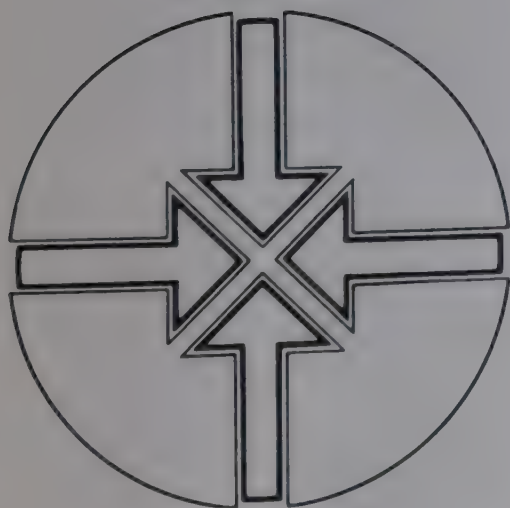
Jagriti is a voluntary agency with a team of seven people working with the tribals in Maharashtra for the past three and a half years. The organization was set up by four persons who came to this area with a view to work among the local tribals. The area is very backward, poor and comprises hilly terrain. After initial exploration and building rapport with the local people, the core team of Jagriti began working on a series of small activities including adult education centres, non-formal education and taking up of issues of local people with government officials. Several important struggles have been launched in the course of this period and in many of the 14 villages where Jagriti works, strong local people's committees have emerged which are beginning to analyse their situation and take initiatives for their own improvement. While the work of the initial team has now been going on for five years, it is only in the past two and a half years that regular funding for its programmes became possible.

PROCESS

The donor agency supporting Jagriti asked it to seek the help of some outside agency to evaluate its programme, in particular its future directions, so that decisions about the scope of future funding could be made. The two then approached the intervening agency jointly. It was discussed that the role of the intervening agency should be to assist in the process of reflection on Jagriti, in particular its internal organizational mechanism. It was suggested by the facilitators that this evaluation exercise should not be seen as linked with the future funding of Jagriti. It was then clarified by the donor that it was committed to supporting Jagriti in the future, so the question of future funding is not whether funding will take place or not, but for what. The intervening agency then agreed to facilitate this process.

An initial planning workshop was held with two other voluntary agencies from the area interested in undertaking participatory evaluation for themselves. In this workshop, general principles and philosophy of participatory evaluation were discussed and each organization evolved its own plans for evaluation. The facilitators' team helped in setting of evaluation objectives and methods of data-collection and analysis necessary to accomplish the same.

Subsequent to this workshop the facilitators' team made a field visit to the area of work of Jagriti and observed its programmes in the field, talked to some members of the local communities, but spent most of the time discussing the work of Jagriti, individually and collectively, with the seven full-time staff of Jagriti. More time was spent with senior and original core



team members in helping them reflect on the experiences of the past two and a half years and identifying issues of concern that need to be resolved for the future. From this, a list of issues was prepared which then became the basis for a second round of reflection in the field, after a few months.

During the second round of field visit, most of the time was spent in reflecting with the core team and the rest of the staff on the issues which were identified previously. The bulk of these issues related to the organizational structure and functioning of Jagriti and its future directions. Based on these deliberations, discussions and analysis, some suggestions for the future direction were agreed upon. These are reported as follow:

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE

(i) Need for redefining the objectives

The present set of objectives of Jagriti are more a statement of activities than the objectives that one could accomplish. As a consequence, Jagriti gets bogged down in completion of those activities and not accomplishing a broad set of objectives.

It appears that the objectives of Jagriti could be broadly laid down so that it could accomplish them through a variety of activities, including the ones currently undertaken. It is suggested that Jagriti should have its objectives as "utilizing educational and organizational strategies for socio-economic improvements of the tribals" This will indicate socio-economic improvements of tribals as long term goals to be accomplished primarily through educational and organization-building efforts.

(ii) Need for integrating new programmes

Jagriti has recently begun several new activities with the help of aid. These include land improvement programme, construction of a training centre and building a farm for self-sufficiency.

Land alienation appears to be a general problem of tribals in these areas. Jagriti should take this up seriously if it wants tribals to improve their economic situation. Hence, it may become a major activity in different villages.

However, the training centre and the farm need to be clearly planned and integrated with the field work of Jagriti. It is important to ensure that building of the training centre and development of the farm does not imply that trained and experienced field staff withdraw from field work; and creation of this institutional infrastructure does not become a liability to the ongoing educational and organizational work of the tribals in the villages.

(iii) Need for redesigning the structure

As mentioned earlier, the main weakness of Jagriti relates to its existing organizational structure. For one, the structure in its present shape appears to have served a useful function in the early stages of the work of Jagriti. At this present stage, when, consolidation is important, this structure requires several modifications as indicated below:



- (a) The existing governing body of Jagriti is internal and comprises some staff and local villagers. It is perhaps important to distinguish Jagriti from the local people's organizations. The two can have mutually supportive and complementary roles, but are not identical. It appears that the motivations, supervision and development of staff of Jagriti has been hampered by the structure of its present governing body.

It is suggested that the governing body of Jagriti should comprise external members who are not full-time staff. These persons can bring in objectivity, guidance, linkages with outside resources and provide a more broad-based character to the organization. A small governing body, of say five persons, would be desirable. The secretary of Jagriti can be a full-time staff and *ex-officio* member of the governing body, acting as its secretary.

- (b) Existing field staff should each be assigned a particular area with a set of villages and asked to take complete responsibility for the same. Thus the staff should have area-wise focus, and relevant activities for that area can be evolved. For the time being, the secretary can play the role of field coordinator both by visiting the field (each area at least once a month) and by chairing monthly review and planning meetings.
- (c) The secretary is expected to perform the following support and problem-solving roles:
- attend monthly area level meetings;
 - guide in solving local problems;
 - deal with the government;
 - liaison with the outside world (including funders);
 - administrative supervision;
 - secretary to the governing body.
- (d) The staff of Jagriti has considerable experience now but lack systematic training. There is a need for them to develop the context, content and methods of this type of work, with a long-term perspective. It is necessary that general training for field staff be urgently organized.

Besides, specialized training is necessary as well. The staff which is going to be responsible for the training centre needs to develop skills as trainers. The secretary needs to be equipped with a number of additional skills for ensuring ongoing, smooth functioning of the organization.

Field visits to other groups and organizations can be useful as a learning experience. Resources should be separately earmarked for such a training.



(iv) Finances

The core funding for Jagriti is presently coming from one donor. In the light of the additional staff required and expanding scope of

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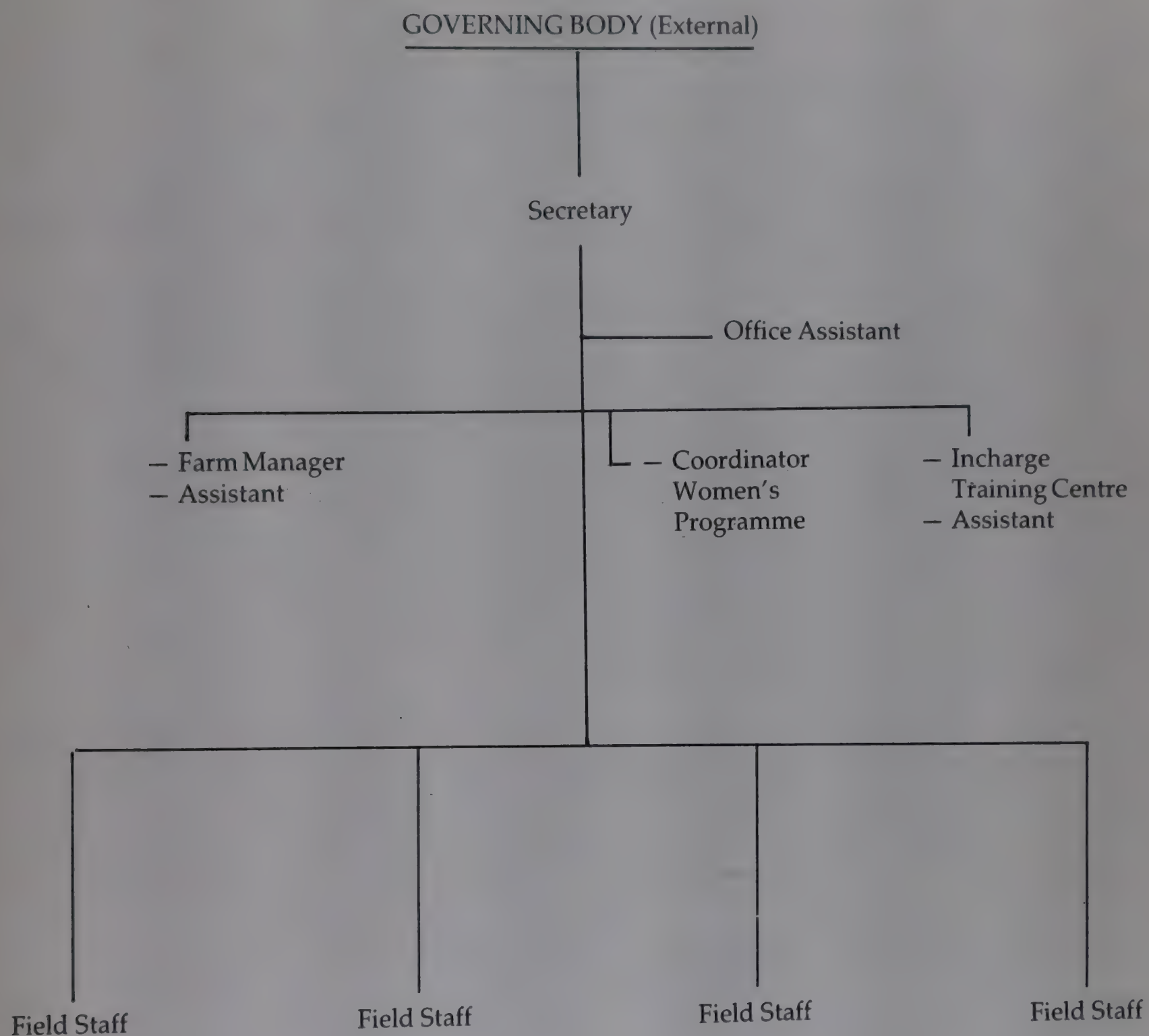
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activities, Jagriti should explore additional funding as well. It is necessary to secure ongoing bases of funding for the core staff and activities of Jagriti over the next three to five years' period so that the beginnings made so far can be further consolidated and expanded.

The proposed organization structure suggests that 11 full-time staff are needed in Jagriti. This may also need to be considered by the new governing body. The current salary structure of the staff has some anomalies, with a couple of people being relatively underpaid. It is suggested that the new governing body should take this matter urgently and rationalize the salary structure.



PROPOSED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF JAGRITI



Note: Existing staff is seven: four field, one Programme Coordinator, one Assistant and one Secretary.

Total Staff needed: 11

ISSUES

The main issues emerging from the Jagriti evaluation are as follows:

1. The focus of the evaluation of Jagriti was initially not very clear. In the planning workshop, senior Jagriti staff talked about the need for assessing the impact of its work over the past 2–3 years. The short duration of their involvement in the area, with a small team and limited programme, made it difficult to assess whether the programme had made any difference or not. It was only in the first field visit that the focus of evaluation emerged more clearly. When the members of Jagriti started listing the issues of concern to them, then it became evident that the focus was on strategy and organizational mechanism of Jagriti.
2. In this case, the experience of negotiating with the donor became an interesting issue. When the donor initially approached the intervening agency, it was looking at the proposed evaluation as a basis to decide whether to continue funding the programme or not. The discussions with the donor and Jagriti together made it clear that the issue of funding may seriously hinder the critical reflection process by Jagriti. It was then emphasized by the intervening agency that the donor and Jagriti must sort out the issue of future funding, and delink it (especially whether or not to continue funding) from the evaluation process. Only then can a serious reflection process be initiated and sustained.



INTER SCHOOL PROJECT

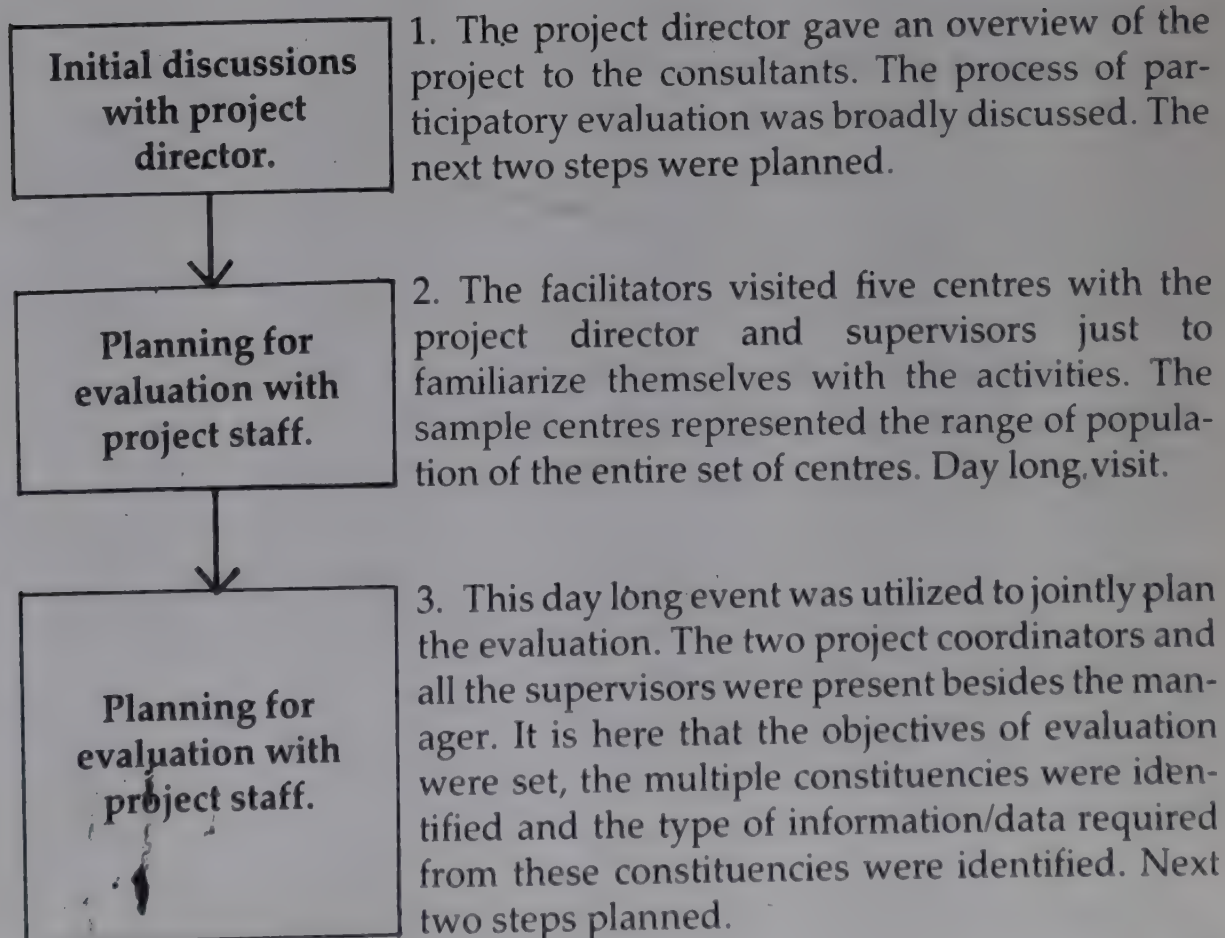
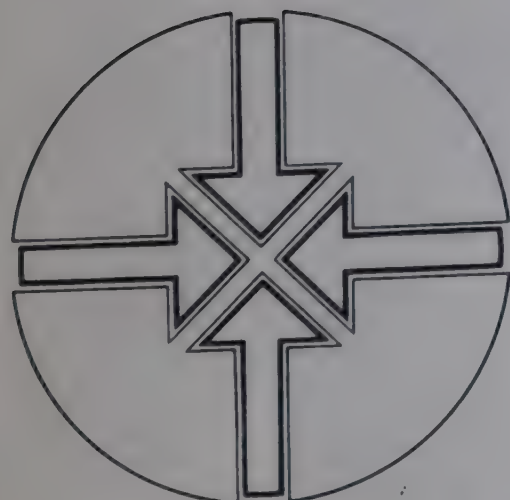
CONTEXT

In late 1976, as part of a scheme of the Board of Secondary Education, Bombay, ninth and tenth class students from private schools were involved in a non-formal education (NFE) programme where these students became teachers of non-school-going children (age 5-16) in the urban slums.

At the time of the evaluation, 15 centres for slum children in the Inter School Project (about five each by three participating schools) were running.

Each centre consisted of about 30 learners in the Inter School Project (ISP). The centres were run six days a week for 1½ hours each day. The student teachers worked in small groups (about 40 from each school) and were supervised by an adult Non-Formal Education worker attached to each school. Project staff also comprised two professional coordinators, a manager and a typist-secretary. The project director approached two facilitators to discuss the possibility of undertaking the evaluation, over the next seven months. The different steps in the evaluation process are shown below.

STEPS IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS



Discussions with volunteer teachers regarding evaluation plan.

4. Half day exercise to discuss the objectives and tentative plans of evaluation with volunteer teachers leading to elaboration and modification. Two-day event planned with all volunteer teachers to initiate the evaluation process.

Refinement of data collection plan and identification of methods with project staff.

5. The evaluation plan, and in particular data-collection plan, refined and finalized with project staff. The instruments needed for data collection and alternative methods identified and responsibility for data collection and instrument design allocated. The design of instrument as well as data collection was shared between project coordinators, supervisors, volunteer teachers, student teachers and consultants.

Finalization of instruments for Inter School Project.

6. The instruments were finalized in the joint meeting of all project staff and plans for data-collection in the Inter School Project made.

Data collection for Inter School Project.

7. As per plan, data-collection began and was completed in a month as the schools were closing for summer vacation.

Discussions with student teachers, analysis and feedback evolved.

8. A facilitator along with the non-formal education worker of the school held discussions with a few student teachers to involve them in the evaluation. The objectives and plans for evaluation were explained and they were invited to join in the evaluation process. The event was also used to collect data through group interviews.

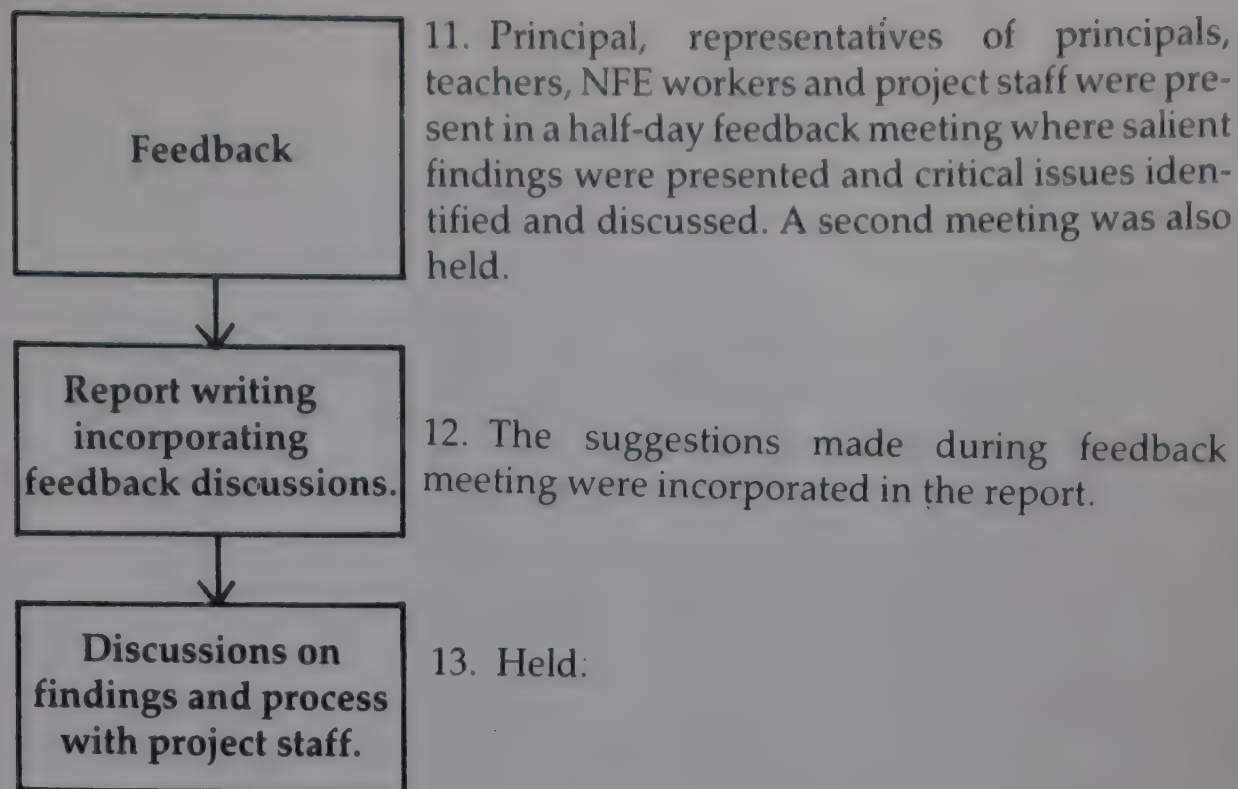
Plan for data analysis

9. Along with project staff, a plan for data analysis and feedback evolved. All parties were assigned responsibility for preliminary analysis of data collected by them.

Individual and collective data analysis.

10. Data was analysed individually first and then a collective (with project staff) analysis session was held. Feedback meetings within schools were planned.





SALIENT FINDINGS

1. The study showed that, on the whole , the student teachers had benefited from their involvement in the NFE project.

A questionnaire was administered to the student-teachers in the three schools. The data showed that a majority of the students in the three schools enjoyed working on the project and expressed interest in teaching children. Thus, 94 per cent of the student teachers in School A (N = 47), 80 per cent in School B (N = 31) and 95 per cent in School C (N = 21) expressed this opinion.

Most student teachers also felt that they had benefited personally from their participation in the programme. Some of the changes noticed by them were:

"I am now concerned about the poor people. I want to help them in any small way I can."

"The teaching in the centre has changed me completely. I have become aware of the problems that teachers face while teaching. It has broadened my opinion on need for education."

"Yes, I have changed a little. For instance, I do not look upon the slum children indifferently and now try to understand their problems."

"I have come to know a fraction of those living below the poverty line better than what I knew about them earlier."



"We have come to know about poverty in India."

"It has made me feel the intensity of the problems India is presently facing. The direct exposure has made me aware of certain problems personal, economic, etc., which I had never thought of earlier."

A majority of the parents had also noticed a favourable change in their children: 46.7 per cent in School A (N = 43) and 65 per cent in School B (N = 20). Some of the changes observed were:

"There are marked changes in her temperament and approach to human problems."

"She is more patient, more cooperative, more helpful, more understanding than before."

"No apparent changes noticed, but I feel the changes will come and the experience and training will make her grow into a socially aware person."

In addition, the class teachers and the NFE workers had also noticed positive changes in the student teachers.

2. On the whole, the study indicated that the school teachers were not well informed about the NFE project.

In each school, the teachers' incharge, the class teachers and a sample of other teachers were administered a questionnaire. Their responses indicated that the teachers were not very clear about the objectives of the NFE project nor about the communities in which the students were working nor of the other schools that were involved in the project. There was also a lack of clear understanding about the aims and objectives of the project itself as part of the school curriculum. This was true even for the teachers incharge.

In terms of their attitude towards the project too, a large number of them tended to be indifferent towards the project. Even a large number of students perceived their indifference to the project – 74 per cent in School C (N = 21), and 50 per cent in School B (N = 47). Among the suggestions offered by the teachers for making the NFE project more effective in the school were.

"Teachers in general should be made more aware of the project, especially the class teachers."

"An awareness must be brought about and the whole school as a body must know about it and work towards it through different means."

3. The three principals showed interest in and commitment to the idea of NFE work.

In depth interviews with the principals/vice-principals indicated that there was full commitment to the aims and objectives of the NFE project. A



need had been felt by the top school managers to start community service for students. The schools became involved in the project as it was felt that it would have a positive impact on the minds of the children or else they would never understand the problems of poverty in the country. The project's achievements so far were summarized by one principal thus:

"What the students could not get from standards one to 10, they can get in one year",

indicating thereby the positive impact of the programme on the school children.

4. The study indicated that the NFE project had some positive impact on learners.

One of the main findings here related to the fact that almost all the learners interviewed enjoyed being at the NFE Centre. They differed in their preferences for specific activities but they liked the wide variety of teaching methods such as drama, singing, games, outings, study, etc., that were used.

Overwhelmingly favourable reaction was expressed by them about student teachers who, they said, "taught lovingly". All the NFE workers were also praised by the learners.

The parents of learners felt the same way. They had only favourable opinions about student teachers and NFE workers.

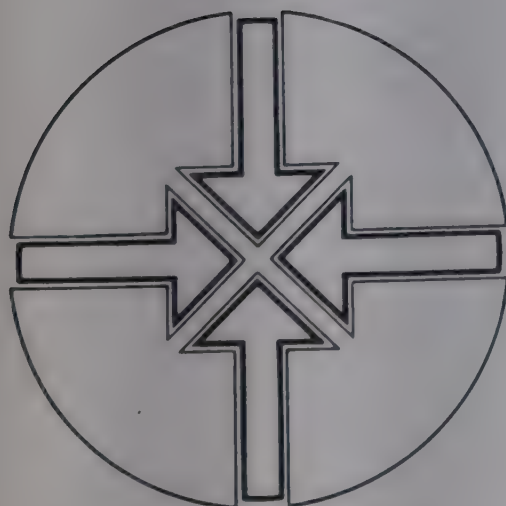
5. The role of the NFE worker is such that she faces multiple and conflicting demands.

The NFE worker in the project has a complex and difficult role (see Fig. 3). She is simultaneously dealing with such diverse constituencies as local communities, parents of learners, student teachers, other teachers, principals and other project staff. This presents multiple and, at times, conflicting demands about her work. Thus an NFE worker needs to possess a range of skills to deal with such diverse constituencies.

Another aspect of this role is the apparent confusion about the identity of the NFE worker. Is she a part of the school system or the project organization or both? Is she inside the school or outside it? If she is outside the school, how does she influence the school system? If she is inside the school, does she perform other tasks of the school? In particular, School A has resolved this problem by taking on the NFE worker as its full time staff. Thus she performs multiple responsibilities, besides NFE project, as part of the school faculty. In other two schools, this tension is still continuing.

6. There had not been much systematic interaction between schools in the implementation of the project.

Interviews with student teachers, NFE members and project staff, school social workers, and principals indicated that while there had been some interaction between the NFE workers and among students of the three schools during the training programmes, the three schools had tended, by



and large, to work independently of one another. Suggestions included meetings between the three schools and sharing of experiences so that the schools could learn from one another and further strengthen the functioning of the project.

7. On the whole, student teachers had benefited more than children in the community and the community at large.

Interviews with principals, school social workers, NFE workers, project staff and some community members seemed to indicate that despite the fact that positive changes had been perceived in the learners, yet the NFE project had tended to give priority to the needs of the student teachers rather than the needs of the learners or the needs of the community.

ISSUES

Several issues emerged from this experience:

1. A key issue in this evaluation process was that of timing. The process of evaluation started in February, and the entire data collection exercise had to be over by April, before the schools closed for summer holidays. This put a considerable strain on the process and stretched the capacities of the project staff. The facilitating agency also had to make substantial time commitments in one lot.

The summer holidays were used for analysis and discussion within the project staff. The feedback to the schools, their principals, teachers and others had to be organized soon after the schools reopened. This helped in implementing some of the decisions which resulted from the feedback meetings.

2. The second issue in this evaluation was that of managing multiple constituencies. The NFE worker's role got translated into the evaluation process, as the project itself spanned several constituencies, besides the slum communities, students, teachers, principals/administrators, parents of students – a geographically, culturally and conceptually varied set of constituencies. Each constituency has its own purposes, its own perceptions of evaluation, its own pace and space, its own preferences. The process of evaluation had to understand, and relate to, each of these constituencies and involve them in the evaluation. The task of managing the involvement of this diverse set of constituencies in the evaluation process proved to be quite a difficult one.

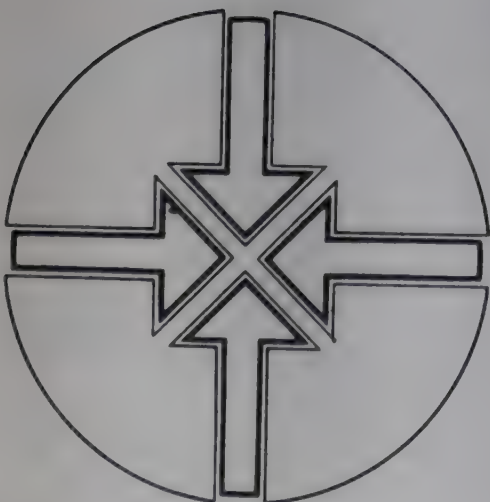
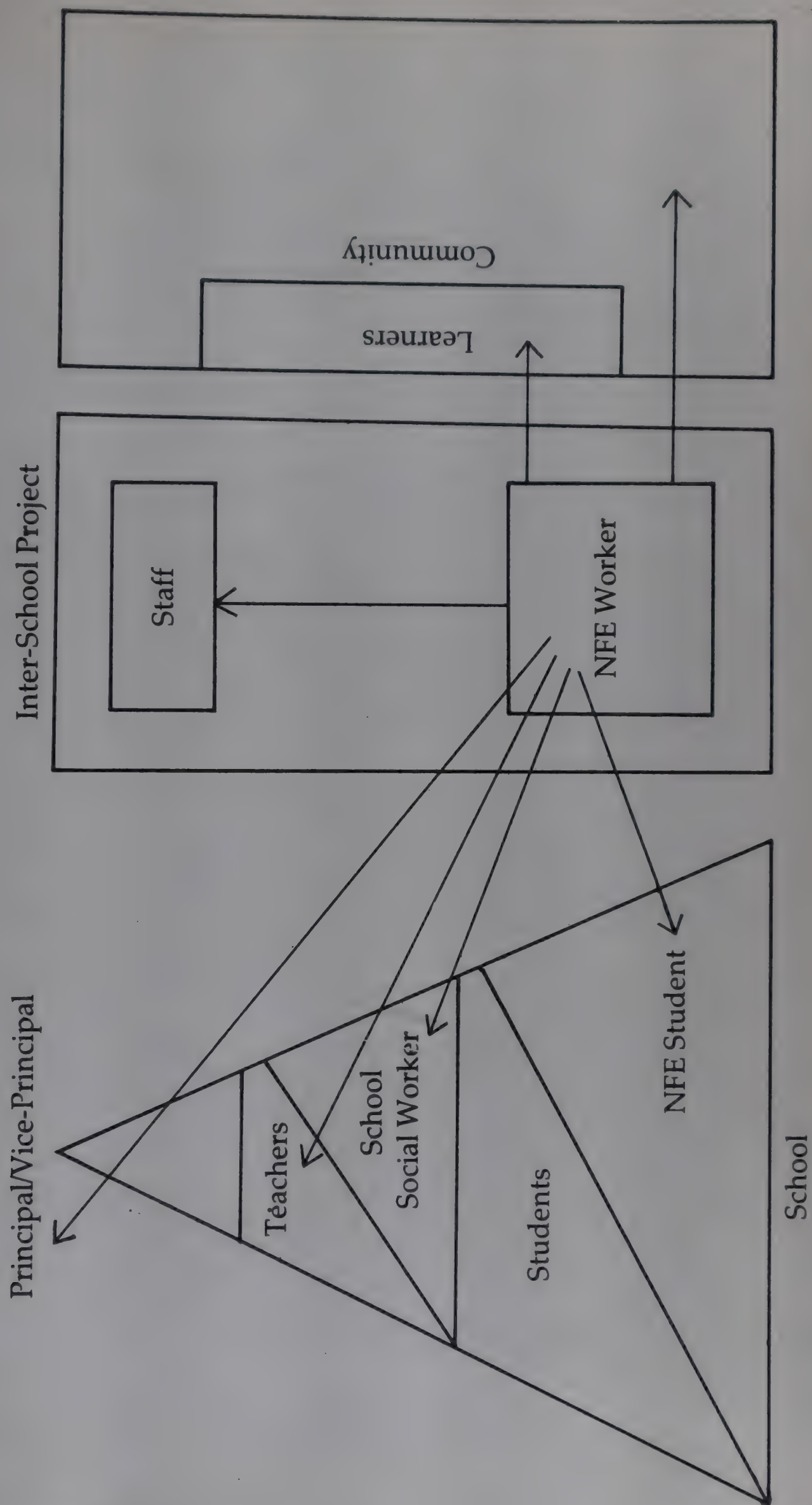


FIGURE A : ROLE OF THE NFE WORKER



TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

BACKGROUND

Tribal Development Society (TDS) is a field based voluntary organization working among the tribals in the backward regions of southern Bihar for the last eight years. It started its activities with a primary health care programme which essentially focussed on providing curative extension services for tuberculosis (TB), malaria and other diseases prevalent in the tribal villages. This work provided a legitimate entry for TDS into the tribal communities. Through this work, TDS gradually learnt about the problems and the forces that marginalized the tribals in the region. The local moneylenders and liquor merchants had captured all the assets (land, trees, cattle, utensils, implements, etc.) that belonged to the tribals. Over several years, the tribals became indebted and in turn bonded to the local moneylenders and liquor merchants.

The initial core team of six persons working with TDS was disturbed by the indebtedness, bondage, and land and other asset alienation. The core team discussed the issue with the local tribals and started mobilizing people with the prime objective of empowering the community so that they can organize themselves to combat the exploitative forces. Over a period of two years the mobilization efforts developed into a large scale people's movement. In this process, about ten thousand tribal families from 90 tribal villages started coming together. This effort led to the formation of the Tribal People's Organization (TPO) in the area, with its own local leadership.

Along with the process of building Tribal People's Organization and building community leadership, TDS assisted the tribals by taking advantage of the existing government programmes and legislations, in their struggle to get back their alienated assets. TDS's effort has helped the community to redeem itself from economic exploitation. Once the assets of the tribals came back to them, the need for credit both for consumption and for production became apparent. TDS helped the tribal families to acquire credit from local banks and thereby revitalize their economy.

During the first five years of work among the tribals, TDS was involved in a lot of programmes, but in terms of direction of work and organizational operation, TDS was not clear what path it should take. There was a lack of clarity on whether they should continue helping the tribals or not.



If they continue, then how? Should they undertake some developmental programmes with the assistance of the government? At this point, the organization was functioning essentially as a small core group of 10 persons (which included the original founders) and a local team of 10 animators. The organization as a whole was functioning like a family with an informal and personalized style of decision-making. The lack of clarity in terms of direction of work, added to personal and informal decision-making practices, created a sense of dissatisfaction, stagnation and frustration among the core group as well as among the new support colleagues. At this point TDS felt the need to undergo a process of critical reflection about its past in order to derive directions for its work and strength for its organizational functioning, and for its future.

PROCESS

A team of two facilitators was consulted by the head of TDS to help conduct the evaluation exercise. The team made a preliminary visit to the organization. This visit reconfirmed the apathy, demoralization, frustration and lack of direction prevailing among the core team and animators. So, the process of evaluation was essentially to encourage the core team members to reflect on what they have failed to do and to visualize what relevant role they can play within the present situation.

Three months after the preliminary visit, the evaluation process was carried out. The process continued in three phases, over a period of 12 months. Both the facilitators were not involved during the whole period of the evaluation process. During each stage of the evaluation process, the facilitators raised the concerns and tried to put them in a perspective, and then left it to the organization to work it out in more detail so that they themselves could systematize their understanding.

The prime objective of Phase I of the process was to identify the issues of evaluation. This exercise was carried out among the core group members only. The main contention was, who was to be involved in the process of evaluation? It was thought that as the primary concern of the evaluation was related to the organizational aspect i.e. lack of direction and sense of confusion about the nature and style of functioning, perhaps it was important to involve the core team at the beginning, and, as the process moved on, the animators and selected people from the tribal communities could join. Perhaps at the beginning of the process the involvement of all the members could create and heighten tensions among the core members to reflect on their frustration and other concerns.

The first phase of the process was also used to collectivize the concern among the core group members. It is important to note that all the core group members agreed on the concerns mentioned at the beginning. To recheck the degree of collective agreement on the issues, individual consultation and feedback was taken up by the facilitators.



After this exercise a weeklong exercise was undertaken with the core group members and animators, both collectively and individually to further reflect on these concerns. Certain subtle things like lack of normative framework for work, accountability and delegation of responsibility, lack of clarity in the role of the governing body, lack of forum and system for decision making came up during individual consultations.

The first two days were spent with the core group members. They were given enough support and strength to list out the achievements and failures. Once this exercise was over, the facilitators helped consolidate this information on the achievements and failures. During these two days, effort was also made to informally get personal feedback on the tentative causes of failure and success and what each member felt about the future direction. This informal individual consultation helped the facilitators to situate TDS not only in terms of the present but also its future. This projection gave enough stimuli to the core staff to relate to the organization.

After a gap of two days the core group and animators were advised to reflect on the achievements and failures and to think about the future directions separately. The facilitators were constantly among the members to help the group to spell out the causes, to build up an atmosphere of sharing, to reduce personal conflicts, etc.

The first phase of the exercise led to the identification of critical achievements and major lacunae, limitations and shortcomings of TDS over the past years. The reflection process was separately carried out for the core team as there were some interpersonal conflicts and issues which needed to be addressed. This critical reflection process helped also in the team building for the core team. Separate sessions were held with animators to invite their inputs in the reflection process. The first phase of the critical reflection process led to the rearticulation of the directions and thereby clarification of the perspectives of TDS. Strengthening Tribal People's Organizations (TPOs) became the major work for the future.

Soon after the process of reflection, the second phase of the evaluation started. The staff members of TDS carried the information systematized during the reflection process to the tribal villages. The purpose of this exercise was to analyse the emerging thoughts on the success, failure and future direction along with the tribal communities. During the next three months, the core staff and the animators decided to use village camps to evaluate their work with the tribals. These camps were organized in the form of village fairs, village meetings, group meetings, special camps for youth and women etc. Along with the feedback of the community, the core team was encouraged to develop various programmes and to think about the organizational mechanism of TDS that will help it accomplish the future direction.

During the succeeding three months, the core staff also systematized the new information and insights they found during the village meetings. This process helped the core team to develop new programmes for the tribal areas and to strengthen TPOs.



The second phase of the evaluation process was culminated after six months of reflection, discussion and analysis by the core team and animators and their meetings with the tribals. A follow-up weeklong workshop was held with the core team and animators, separately and jointly to look at the emerging programme proposals. The emerging programmes of non-formal adult education, health care, biogas, land improvement, training etc. were critically examined in the light of overall perspective of strengthening TPOs in the area.

The core members have still not been able to locate their memberships in the organization as the roles and structure were not clear. Along with the development of programmes, organizational mechanism, role distribution, work norms appropriate for effective functioning were also discussed. A more systematized planning and formal mechanism of functioning and procedure and norms necessary for its implementation were established during the meeting.

During the next three months the core staff began to implement these decisions. At the end of it, a final session was held with the staff. This was to review the process of involvement of staff in the new direction and structure set by the team members themselves for the organization.

During the whole process, the facilitators contributed essentially to the task of facilitating clarification of task, role and perspective by the core team of TDS. The final session not only revealed the revitalized strength of the members but also projected the future vision and the role of TDS.

SOME FINDINGS

The central findings and main proposals of the organization are mentioned here.

A. ACHIEVEMENTS OF TDS

Listed in order of priority and consolidated from different perspectives, following are the main achievements of TDS.

1. Removal of moneylenders and liquor merchants

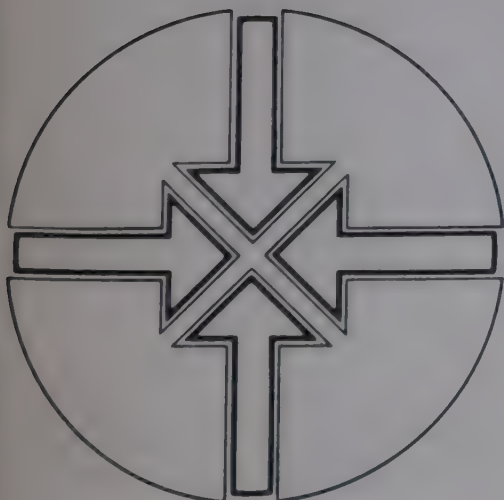
This was seen as a pace-setter achievement which entailed removal of bondage and release of land, trees, utensils, etc., belonging to tribals.

2. The emergence of TPOs

The collective organization of tribals emerged as a vehicle for their own development. Tribal People's Organizations (TPOs) were formed at village, regional and central levels and local tribal leadership emerged.

3. Availability of institutional finance

After the release of mortgaged land, the tribals made use of loans from the bank to acquire bullocks and other productive assets. More than 20 lakh rupees have been made available in the area and it helped build the credibility of TDS.



4. Savings schemes and consumption loans

The promotion of an individual and collective savings habit succeeded to a large extent and loans for consumption purposes became available to avoid outside moneylenders in future.

5. Enhancement in self-confidence of tribals

The tribals have grown and have shed some fears. They have acquired a voice for themselves. Their actions and successes have led to an enhancement of their own confidence and self-image. They are now able to face outsiders squarely and discuss matters openly.

6. Increase in the awareness among tribals

The tribals have become more aware of their own situation, their needs, rights and responsibilities. There has been a significant reduction in dependence on black magic for health problems and a greater awareness of health rights. Similar increases in awareness of need for education and improved status of women have become visible.

7. Physical achievements

TDS has been able to provide assistance in physical areas like irrigation wells, drinking water wells, agricultural inputs, biogas, goatery, dairy, etc. There has been a reduction in the incidence of TB and malaria.

8. The development of TDS

From a small beginning, TDS has evolved into a viable, ongoing entity. It has developed external and local credibility, independence and self-confidence. It now stands on its own feet. It has been able to bring and hold together a committed group of young persons.

There were several interesting variations in these achievements. Most animators saw mainly the tangible things as achievements. Even within the core group, some members emphasized tangible, physical accomplishments. Others primarily emphasized intangibles. The prioritization exercise done by animators, however, revealed striking similarities with those of the core group. The above listing is a coherent articulation of all these perspectives.

B. FAILURES AND SHORTCOMINGS

Though several items were detailed out as failures or shortcomings of TDS, the most important ones are listed below:

1. Lack of an effective organizational system

Problems like lack of working norms, procedures, salary structure, work follow-up, indiscipline, planning, accountability, etc., were mentioned in this regard.

2. Lack of effective training

Lack of staff development, reflection, study, identification and building of local talent, knowledge about how not to create dependence, develop-



ment of second line of leadership, etc., were identified as some of the issues here.

3. Lack of future plans

Overall strategy of TDS, its future directions and plans had become fuzzy lately.

4. Communication and interpersonal difficulties in core group

The question of centrality-marginality, sharing of information, lack of clarity about initiatives, mistrust, etc., were some of the issues raised.

5. Plateau and slide-back

Some areas of achievements of the past are being reopened as problematic. Less enthusiasm in TPO, more impact of outsiders and other negative trends are visible. TPO has not been sufficiently involved in TDS.

6. Lack of intensive work with youth and women

Though sporadic efforts have been made to work with tribal youth and women, there has not been any pre-planned, intensive work with these two groups. This could have perhaps further strengthened TPO

Many of these failures and shortcomings formed a focus of further analysis and discussions in the core group. Some were taken up as future directions for TDS.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The following future directions for TDS were evolved through consensus:—

1. To strengthen TPO

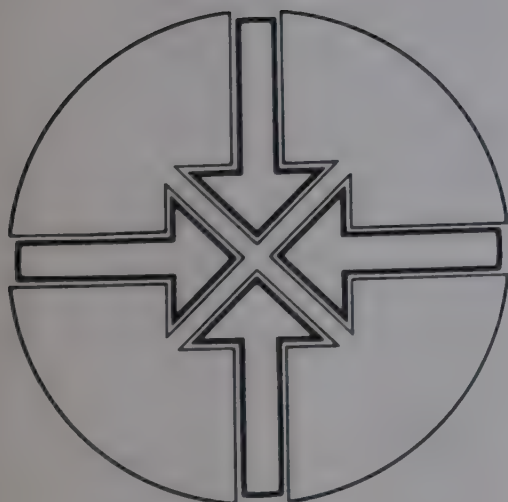
By strengthening village and regional committees, including TPO functionaries in the activities of TDS; encouraging TPO to take on more responsibility for the activities of TDS; TDS-initiated activities; training TPO leaders and functionaries.

2. To build and consolidate organization of youth/women

By organizing non-formal education, meetings, melas, training programmes, camps, exposure to other areas and groups; inducting local youth to work with TPO as its animators; starting with some women health workers to develop nucleus of women's organization.

3. To enhance cultural exposure of tribals

Culture as entertainment, source of solidarity, collective identity, way of binding themselves, means of expressing themselves, for raising awareness; as a mechanism for building new organizations and strengthening TPO; cinema slides, puppetry, folk dances, songs, etc., as possible elements.



4. To organize primary and non-formal adult education

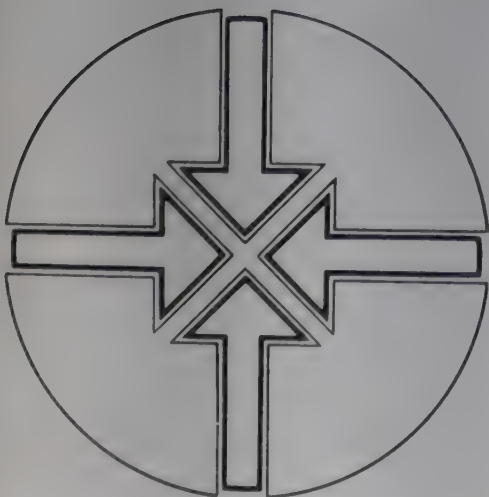
Legal education as part of adult education, for mobilization and organization-building; formal primary education to be designed innovatively with the active involvement of TPO, as a long-term strategy for strengthening the tribal organizations.

ISSUES

Some interesting issues in this evaluation were:

1. Building a climate of openness, trust, sharing and reflection in the early stages was a crucial intervention by the facilitators. The core team members were demoralised, suspicious, cynical and angry when the evaluation began. It was necessary to create a climate where members could distance themselves from the TDS, and look at it critically. Substantial interventions had to be made by the facilitators in building such an atmosphere in the core group. And sustaining such a climate demanded continuity of such interventions for quite some time.

2. Another issue related to the selection of the two facilitators. The core team of TDS was in such a state then that it could not have accepted an outside facilitator easily. The head of TDS approached the two facilitators tentatively. The initial visit by the facilitators was largely seen as an occasion of testing of facilitators by the core team members. The actions of the facilitators had to be confidence-generating and trust-building in the early stages. Only when the core team members began to feel comfortable with, and trust, the facilitators, the actual reflection process could begin. As one of the core team members later commented, "We were looking for committed insider-outsider facilitators".



WORKERS' EDUCATION PROJECT

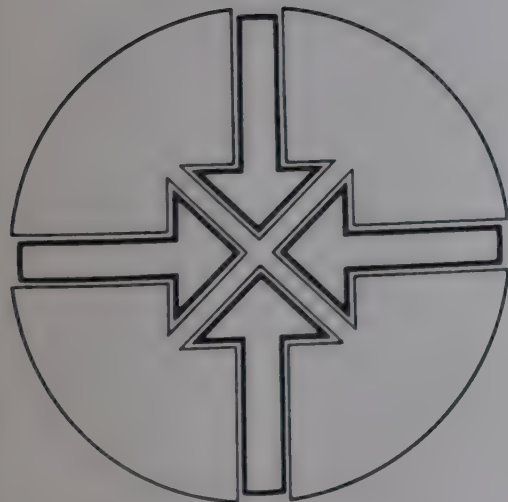
A project for non-formal educational work with workers in the unorganized sector is being carried out in a big industrial town of Uttar Pradesh for the past five years. The project had its roots in the need for the new generation of workers, including women workers who were joining the workforce (largely coming from rural areas), finding their survival difficult and being unable to cope with the demands of their new situation. Informal discussions with small groups of these workers highlighted the need to have a forum where workers could come and share their experiences, talk to each other and discover ways of enhancing their understanding of their new roles, their rights and duties and develop a perspective on the working class. An informal initiative had been taken five years ago, where in a small room near the workers' colony young workers assembled in twos, threes, fives, tens, during evenings and holidays to talk with each other.

This initiative was taken by a senior worker-educator who had been active with the organized sections of the working class earlier. Gradually some more workers began to volunteer their time in this centre which began to be known as the Workers' Education Centre. After two years of ad hoc and informal functioning, a small project was prepared to provide opportunity for a more systematic training of workers about their rights, preparation of learning materials for them and creating other events which would help build solidarity and unity among these young workers. This project had an initial duration of three years and has shown certain concrete results.

THE PROCESS

Before this project was to come to its end, the donors requested for an evaluation of the experience, so that future programmes could be systematically evolved. The intervening organization was approached by the project leader to assist in this exercise of critical reflection. It was evident, during the consultations with the project leader and the representative of the donor agency, that resources was not the issue in the evaluation process. The issue was clarifying the future directions and perspective of the Workers' Education Project.

It was proposed that the reflection process could be in two steps: the first step could be with the project team which by then comprised of three



full time staff and six regular volunteers. Subsequently, discussions with workers who use the centre and the project could also be undertaken. A five day critical reflection exercise was undertaken with the project team and an analysis of the situation of the workers was the starting point for this reflection. Based on that analysis, the need for an educational effort of the type that Workers' Education Project represented was discussed. It was in this context that the concrete experiences of the past three years of this project were analysed and, strengths and weaknesses of the project elaborated.

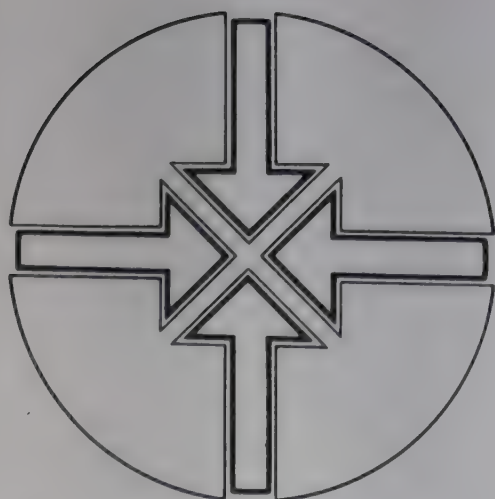
Some of these key strengths and weaknesses were then used as a starting point for discussion with five different small groups of workers who had been using the centre. This work was spread over a period of two weeks, since workers had different shifts, and arranging for them to meet together in small groups of eight to 12 was a major logistic problem.

The critical reflection exercise with the workers was focussed upon their experiences within the project, their educational needs and the extent to which these needs were met and their visions about the future of the Workers' Education Centre.

With these elaborations, the core project team discussed together and developed certain directions for the future which then became the basis for evolving a three years project proposal. In the following pages, a summary of the reflection process with the project team and workers was presented and key issues highlighted.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WORKERS' EDUCATION

- (a) In this context, no educational effort can be neutral. It has to respond to the needs of the workers and has to be, therefore, clearly biased in their interests.
- (b) The learning needs as articulated by workers themselves are broad and vague, and many a time workers themselves do not see any need for their own learning and education. Hence, the content of their education has to be "directed" by the project team and other resource persons who should have a better appreciation of the educational needs of such workers. For example, most of the workers do not even have knowledge of their own factories and this could be promoted through an educational investigation exercise carried out by the workers themselves with the help of the staff.
- (c) However, the methodology of education has to be such that it promotes workers' participation, provides support and listening, and creates warmth and companionship. It is in this context that the informal and comforting atmosphere at the centre becomes crucial.
- (d) The resource centre for educational materials that is being evolved will be initially used by project staff and some workers during the course of their struggles. Ordinary workers will make use of the resource centre only much later.



- (e) Such an educational effort demands multiple roles of the educational staff. Many a time these multiple roles create tension. This may partly explain difficulties in attracting and retaining appropriate staff in the project as well as the need for continuous training, development and emotional support to the educational staff.
- (f) The class of young workers whose educational needs this project has attempted to meet cannot financially support the activities fully. In fact, it is unlikely that such educational efforts can ever be fully self-supporting, and not need any financial assistance from outside.

In the light of the context mentioned earlier, several factors have affected the project strategy and, therefore, appear as the weaknesses of the project, as outlined in the section below.

FACTORS AFFECTING PROJECT STRATEGY

(a) Workers' response

The project has been continuously suffering from what is seen as a poor response from the workers to its various activities. There is a need to take a realistic expectation of workers' response and the present time-frame appears to be too short to expect anything dramatic. Moreover, it is useful to distinguish between the interest, participation and responsibility taken by the workers. There is also a need to see the response of the activists differently from the ordinary workers. Workers' response is also likely to be different in situations of action as opposed to reflection, as well as those involved in personal and collective problem-solving.

(b) Meaning of participation

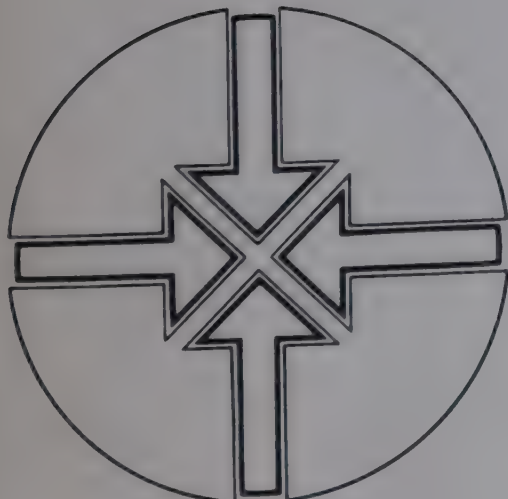
The project seems to indicate some confusion regarding the meaning of participation. This is reflected both in the management of the project as well as its activities. In the management of the project, participation may not imply equal and identical activities and responsibilities by different members of the staff, volunteers, workers, activists, etc. The staff could have taken a more active role of leadership in determining programme content and frequency without necessarily reducing workers' participation.

(c) Response to union

The project and its staff need to have different strategies to respond to union vs. non-union situations. This is particularly important because many unions are just beginning to get formed and are likely to be sensitive to their territorial claims.

(d) Linkage with struggle

Educational activities of workers cannot be seen in isolation of their struggles. This has been demonstrated time and again, through successful, educational efforts carried out during the various struggles



undertaken during the past three years. Perhaps the project has vaccinated on this account of linkages with the ongoing struggles of the workers.

(e) Project structure

The present project structure has roots in its history. This has implications on how the project is perceived by the workers. The behaviour of the full-time staff also affects workers' perception of the project. The structure of an external steering committee and three full-time professional paid staff is likely to be a burden in the next phase where major responsibility and control of workers is envisaged.

ISSUES

The evaluation of Workers' Education Project threw up some interesting issues.

1. One of the major issues in the project was that of perspective. The centre has been initiated informally, and had not yet developed any clear position on its relationship. As the evaluation process moved forward, this issue of perspective became the main focus of deliberation. However, the initial focus of evaluation proposed by the project leader, as well as the donor representative, was to assess the programme and its impact. This evolution of the main concern of the project as the central focus of evaluation is an indication of the methodology itself.

2. Another issue in the evaluation process was the mechanism to involve workers in the reflection process. Since most workers had shifts, worked in different places, and used the centre in different ways, it was quite a logistical and conceptual exercise to promote their involvement in the exercise. It was felt that workers could be involved through group discussions, planned at different times and days to suit their convenience. The reflection process of workers thus provided an important perspective to the evaluation of the project.



ISSUES IN PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

Having looked at various examples in the preceding section, it is now possible for us to highlight some of the key issues that have emerged in the course of our practice and an elaboration of the methodology of Participatory Evaluation. These issues are by no means exhaustive but indicate the kinds of concerns that have regularly confronted us as well as our partner organizations in the course of planning and implementing Participatory Evaluation efforts. Here we describe the issues, the different nuances and aspects, and attempt to state our own position on it as clearly as we understand it today.

1. The first issue relates to the difference between methodology and method.

Participatory Evaluation is a methodology of systematic and critical reflection and analysis of our work. It is a methodology that has a certain world-view and philosophy, and the world-view of participatory evaluation is to enhance the capacity of ordinary people, projects and groups to carry out a systematic and critical reflection and evaluation process of their own activities, programmes, organizations and perspectives on a regular and ongoing basis. It is this demystification of evaluation and strengthening the capacity at the grass-roots to appropriate, control and utilize evaluation that reflects the basic premises of the philosophy of Participatory Evaluation methodology. It is within this overall methodology that the choice of tools, technique and methods can be understood. Should a particular evaluation exercise require, these methods can be for data collection, for facilitating reflection, and for improving analyses. That is to say a whole range of tools, techniques and methods can be utilized in a specific situation in order to facilitate a concrete reflection and evaluation exercise.

2. "I thought you were qualitative"

A very common comment that we hear is that Participatory Evaluation implies qualitative information and its analysis. Wherever we come up with the need to collect or analyse quantitative information in the course of a given Participatory Evaluation exercise, it is resisted, as if this is a violation of the norms of Participatory Evaluation.

The basic confusion mentioned in the previous issue is the source of such misunderstandings. The type of information that is necessary to carry out a systematic process of reflection and critical analysis depends



on a given Participatory Evaluation exercise and its specific objectives. That information can be statistical, cognitive, perceptual, qualitative, etc. Depending on the type of information we need, the type of data collection methods will have to be created. It is conceivable to collect (and we have used it as you can see from the case studies) qualitative as well as statistical and quantitative information in the course of an evaluation exercise. When we need such information, we have to create instruments and questionnaires that are able to elicit such information. We also need to look at records and documents which contain such information, both inside and outside the organization. Qualitative information is more easily obtained through open interviews, group discussions, field observations, etc.

Thus the choice of a particular set of methods for data collection, be they interviews or questionnaires or group discussions or instruments of observation, depends largely on the specific objectives of a given Participatory Evaluation exercise. Those objectives decide what **kind** of information we need to collect; and the **type** of information we need to collect determines the kinds of information collection methods and tools we are going to use.

As the case studies seem to indicate, one can make some tentative generalizations about the patterns *viz.-a-viz.* the method of data collection for different types of Participatory Evaluation exercises. Clearly where the focus of the evaluation is on the programmes and their impact on the ground, a more detailed information about impact can be collected only through structured instruments and questionnaires, and collection of statistical information from records and documents. Thus, Participatory Evaluation exercises initially and largely focussing on programmes tend to be utilizing methods of information collection that are highly quantitative and structured.

On the other hand, those Participatory Evaluation exercises where the focus primarily is on clarifying, sharpening or modifying perspectives and directions of an organization, its teams, people's movement, etc., much more interactive and dialogue methods of information collection and analysis have to be utilized. Shifts in perceptions and understandings are necessary in order to bring about sharpened and modified perspectives within an organization and indepth interviews, informal, small group discussions, dialogues, and other interactive and open-ended methods of information collection and analysis become important in such an exercise. Obviously information about programmes and their impact helps in clarifying the perspective as well in certain situations, but depending on the specific situation, the methods of data collection utilized can vary considerably.

When it comes to the focus on the organization of a grass-roots project or an NGO or a people's movement as the primary focus of a Participatory Evaluation exercise, information of various types becomes necessary. It becomes necessary to understand the manner in which organizations function and therefore perceptual, attitudinal information may be as important as information available from documents and records and files. So, a combination of types of information may demand a combination of



types of data collection methods to be utilized in the course of a Participatory Evaluation exercise.

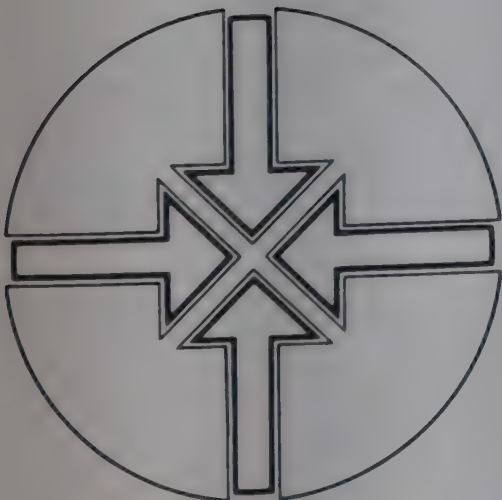
There is one other aspect in the issue of methods of data collection and that has to do with the potential of the method to catalyse reflective processes among the members of the organization itself. A set of methods which are traditionally not considered methods of information collection and analysis like role plays, case studies, drawings, audio-visuals, etc., may be necessary in order to catalyse reflection among the local people and field workers since those are the methods that can be easily utilized by them. For a largely illiterate or semi-literate population, use of paper and pencil instruments may be not so effective. So the choice of data collection methods, wherever flexibility permits, can be such that they facilitate greater involvement and participation, in the reflection and analysis process, of the members of the organizations and the group whose involvement is critical in the Participatory Evaluation exercise. Obviously this choice has to be made within the context of a specific Participatory Evaluation exercise based on the specific objectives of evaluation. No general prescriptions can be made here as well.

3. Who is participating in Participatory Evaluation?

Like in other areas, the word participation in the context of Participatory Evaluation is also a much confused, abused and misused word. The word "participation" sometimes provokes visions of mass involvement, bordering on anarchy. In our definition of Participatory Evaluation as stated previously, who participates depends on a specific situation and on the concrete objectives of the Participatory Evaluation exercise. If we take a grass-roots non-governmental organization's field programme and if we look at the focus of evaluation as programmatic, then clearly most crucial actors in the evaluation exercise would be field workers of the NGOs and the local people and beneficiaries. They would provide the initial analysis and information which can then become the basis for reflection by other members of the organization.

If, however, the focus of evaluation is clarifying the perspective of the NGO then the involvement of members of staff of the NGO is more important than involvement of local population. Changes in perspectives as well as in organizational form, structure and practices do require the involvement, commitment and support of key members of any organization and, therefore, an identification of such key members is necessary if this process of reflection, analysis and change has to be facilitated. Thus the participants in the examples of Participatory Evaluation given here vary considerably in their mixture, character, groupings, etc. Within a given Participatory Evaluation exercise, different parties can be involved at different stages as well as in different ways, and it is not necessary that every party who is a stake-holder in the Participatory Evaluation exercise gets involved in the same way.

The concept of stake-holders may be useful in understanding who gets involved in a given Participatory Evaluation exercise. The party whose interests are directly and primarily influenced by the focal objectives of a given Participatory Evaluation exercise must be involved. But it does not



mean that all the parties must be involved throughout in an identical fashion. This distinction needs to be understood and clarified.

The issue about the nature of stake-holders and who participates also gets influenced by the extent and depth of a given Participatory Evaluation exercise. It is possible that a particular localized programme of a large, well-established NGO with clear perspective and effective organization is the focus. In which case, field workers and staff involved in that programme and local population and groups benefiting from the same are the ones who require to play key roles in such an evaluation exercise. It is possible in such a case that other segments of the organization may not become actively involved. It is also conceivable that in a large non-governmental organization where the primary focus of evaluation is the organizational mechanism and organizational issues, the starting point could be the governing board, the executive head and his/her key team at the very top of the organization, and for quite sometime they may remain the key participants in the process, while other segments of the organization, field level workers and local populations may not be involved in the evaluation exercise directly.

The key question is how do we identify actors, parties, individuals, segments inside and outside the organization which have a varying contribution to the critical reflection and analysis process? It is this kind of focussed identification that should help us determine participants in a Participatory Evaluation exercise. Thus an omnibus, open-ended statement that everybody must participate since it is Participatory Evaluation makes no sense. Once again, a definition of Participatory Evaluation is not based on participation *per se*, but on its capacity to initiate, build and sustain a critical reflection process in a given organization, programme or movement.

4. But what about the donors?

A common question in our experience has been the role of donors in a Participatory Evaluation exercise. As we have mentioned in the case studies many a times, a particular donor or a team of donors took the initiative in convening a process of Participatory Evaluation; sometimes this initiative comes jointly through the programme or NGO funded by them. Sometimes, it comes directly to a facilitating agency. The needs of resource providers in terms of evaluation have to be recognized as legitimate. This is true in all situations. The question is what kind of information do a set of resource providers need from a given context in order to help them make their own decisions. Thus the concerns and needs of donors must be explicitly taken into consideration and the place for this consideration to be articulated is in the initial stage of setting the objectives of evaluation. Inputs on resource providers and donors can be useful in fixing the objective of a given Participatory Evaluation exercise.

The other place where donors and resource providers can contribute is at a stage where the critical analysis and reflection process has progressed somewhat and broad findings are being articulated and future directions are being evolved. Because of a certain type of knowledge and understanding that resource providers have of a given project or a programme



or an organization, they can also help in this process of reflection as well as setting of future directions and programmes.

But there are several difficulties that arise in practice in the donor's role in a given Participatory Evaluation exercise. First of all, we have tried to de-link funding from the evaluation. We have tried to ask the donor and the project to discuss their funding needs separately. In many cases, the donors have assured continuity of funding and the evaluation exercise could help in determining what type and what form and for what purpose the funding may take place.

De-linking evaluation from funding ensures that the process will be genuine, authentic and critical. If a grass-roots organization or people's movement is worried about continuity of its funding as a consequence of its evaluation exercise, it will try to paint a rosy picture, will try to avoid critical reflections and may end up covering up key issues rather than confronting them.

In the case studies mentioned previously, there are examples where an organization on its own decided to initiate an evaluation process without any direct or indirect request from the donors. This of course is one of most healthy possibilities because this then keeps the issue of funding outside the purview of the evaluation process, and creates the possibility of the process being authentic, open and genuine. As a facilitating agency, it has been our endeavour that we do not become agents or hatchet men for the donors; we have tried to distinguish ourselves from the donors; we have encouraged the project or the organization to discuss openly the need for an evaluation at that point in time; and, there have been examples where this discussion has led to a decision by the project holders or the NGO not to continue with the evaluation exercise at that point in time. Thus even when a request to us comes from the donor, we try to establish links with the project/NGO, encourage them to assert their interests and to play an active and controlling role in the evaluation process. We believe that we should behave as facilitators of the reflection process of the project or the NGO, and not managers of a process on behalf of the donors.

5. What is the role of outsiders?

In our context, the debate on outsiders is a perennial one. First of all, it is hard to figure out who is an outsider. The issue of the outsider in a Participatory Evaluation exercise gets posed in the context of subjectivity and objectivity. Many people believe that a project, an organization or movement on its own cannot be critical enough of its own experiences, practices and programmes, and that its self evaluation may be biased, and that it will hide weaknesses and project strengths. In the very definition of Participatory Evaluation, this is a false notion.

If a project, a grass-roots organization, a people's movement is itself interested in critically reflecting on its own experiences, practices and organization, then it is in its own interest to make the process critical, reflective and open, and not to hide or gloss over shortcomings or weak-



nesses. So our concern is not whether this is subjective and biased, because in our view, all such efforts are, in some way or the other, subjective depending on who the subject is.

The issue is, can, without any external assistance, a project, a group, a movement or an organization facilitate the entire process of critical reflection on its own? Will it have the capacity, the competence and the resources to ensure that appropriate and relevant parties and individuals are involved in setting of the objectives, collection of information, in analysis of their information and in acting on the basis of that analysis? It is our experience, as well as our contention, that it is possible in certain circumstances. We have seen that many well organized groups, institutions, movements have this capacity and competence within themselves to carry out, on an ongoing basis, the process, of critical reflection.

It is also possible that some groups, projects or organizations may not have this capacity and that is where an outside agency or individual could facilitate this process. The role of the outsider in such a situation could be to provide a distance, to help raise issues and questions which may otherwise not get raised or may be difficult to raise, to bring into the open, information and concerns which are generally not so clearly stated, to help in articulating the objectives of an evaluation, to help create methods of information collection and analysis and to help the project or the organization take charge of its own evaluation and use it in its own interest.

There are occasions where we have also played the role of provider of inputs on a particular issue, where we have brought in information or a resource person from outside to share what is happening elsewhere as a contribution to the process of reflection. But in all its diverse roles and activities, the outside agency must continue to ensure that the project or the organization "owns" the evaluation process, feels it is its own and for itself, and gets involved in taking responsibility for it. This does not rule out the possibility of managing, partially, the process of evaluation, particularly the process of data collection.

We have found that in an ongoing organization, members of the group are already over-committed; busy and want us to take the responsibility to ensure that the decisions jointly made with them get implemented (*viz.-a-viz.* collection of information and its analysis). There are situations where an organization deposes a team of its own to manage the process and we essentially play the facilitator's role,

Thus this specific role of the outside agency or individual varies considerably, depending on the given situation and the specific objectives for the evaluation exercise. Any simplistic and universal prescriptions about the outsiders' roles are not warranted in such circumstances.

A related role that we have played on most occasions is that of preparing the report. Invariably, grass-roots organizations have felt that they need a document for future reference and for use inside and outside the organization, which reflects the key findings and the major decisions for follow-up made in an evaluation exercise. It must be stated here that a written



document or an evaluation report is not a necessary ingredient of any Participatory Evaluation exercise. It is essentially a record of the process and the outcome of the exercise, for use by the organization primarily, and by others if it can be a learning experience.

We have found that preparing a draft report on the basis of initial analysis which is jointly shared, helps us to also put our ideas and analysis in place. Invariably, this draft report is then sent back to the organization which discusses it among themselves and then is discussed jointly with the facilitating agency. These discussions on the draft report provide further insights which then become the basis for planning future directions, both of which are incorporated in the final report. We believe that this report is for the organization, and that then it is the responsibility of the organization to decide whether or not to share it with others.

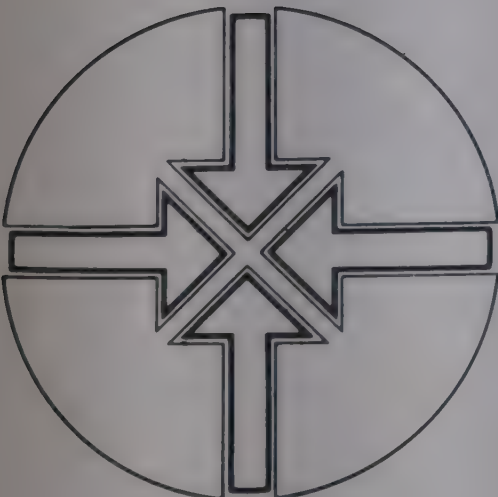
There are also examples of keeping the record of an evaluation experience in audio-visual form. This needs to be further developed and improved.

6. The continuity of evaluation

In our definition, a Participatory Evaluation exercise should be seen as an ongoing process of critical reflection within an organization, programme or people's movement. Therefore, it is continuous as well as periodic. After a few years of experience in one area or in one programme or with a certain methodology, it is possible to take time off to reflect on it critically. And this may become an issue-based or event-based evaluation exercise.

Our experience has suggested that the follow-up of the Participatory Evaluation exercise begins to take place during the exercise itself. In almost all the case studies mentioned here, changes in programmes, perspectives and organizations began to be decided upon and implemented during the course of the evaluation process itself. And sometimes the report of the evaluation exercise is essentially a summation of all the decisions made and implemented in the process itself.

Besides, it is also desirable to concretely plan steps for follow-up from the evaluation exercise. In many cases, broad directions are agreed upon and it is here that future steps in planning and implementing those directions need to be set up at the end of a Participatory Evaluation exercise. The role of the outside facilitator or facilitating agency can continue in the follow-up period, but perhaps needs to be re-negotiated. It is our experience that facilitating a critical reflection exercise demands one type of role; and providing input to implement a new programme or create new organizational mechanisms or systems demands quite another role. Thus we see our role as facilitators of an evaluation process terminating with the making of the follow-up plans and we may continue to be involved, but in a different capacity and different role, in implementing those follow-up plans. This possibility of re-negotiation also opens up the choice for the organization to involve other resource persons, resource organizations and expertise from outside, should it so desire.



On the whole, the entire set of ideas and practices related to Participatory Evaluation are fairly exciting and creative. We find ourselves continuously challenged and energized in each and every evaluation exercise. Ultimately, the criteria for judging its effectiveness have to be the experiences of those who have initiated and gone through this process. If they have benefited through this process of reflection in some way or the other, then it has contributed to enhancing their capacity for continued work. If they have not, then it has failed in its objectives. As an emerging practice and evolving methodology, much more needs to be shared and analysed about its experiences in India and elsewhere. We hope that this would encourage others to do the same.



ABOUT US

The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), New Delhi is a non-profit voluntary organization registered under the Indian Society's Act.

Participatory Research is a methodology based on the belief that knowledge is power and therefore contributes towards the empowerment of the oppressed and the poor. It promotes the involvement of the poor and their organizations and representatives in the creation and utilization of knowledge in their own collective interests. Thus, it attempts to challenge the monopoly over knowledge and its tools in the hands of the few.

PRIA works with local groups and activists involved in the education and organization-building efforts and struggles of the marginalized and underprivileged sections of society.

We provide support through research, training, evaluation, networking with groups on common issues and preparation and dissemination of learning materials.

We are a team of 15 people working with several partner groups all over India.

In the last six years of its existence, PRIA has specially focussed on primary health care and adult non-formal education, problems of deforestation, land alienation and large dams, women and work, women and sanitation, occupational health hazards and management issues of NGOs.

PRIA is constantly involved in efforts to promote the understanding and practice of PT philosophy and methodology by holding workshops and documenting several efforts in the country.

The text of this manual has been prepared by Anil Choudhary and Rajesh Tandon.



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